THE NEW
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RESULTS OF ASSEMBLY POLLS FOR FOUR STATES, 1 UT TODAY

Exercise to begin on Sunday morning across 2,364 counting halls in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu & Puducherry

ELABORATE ARRANGEMENTS AT CENTRES

Stung by criticism over not enforcing Covid-appropriate behaviour during campaigning, the Election Commission has made elaborate arrangements for counting. Apart from ensuring physical distancing, it has barred gatherings outside halls. Counting will begin at 8 am and continue late into the night, with 1,100 observers closely watching over the process | P8

COVID -VE CERTIFICATE MUST FOR AGENTS

- Candidates and agents will have to produce a negative Covid-19 test report or double dose of vaccination certificate to get entry
- The results will have a bearing on Congress' future as a national party, while serving as a litmus test for the BJP's expansion plans
- It will also likely reflect the public perception on Covid handling

200%

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF COUNTING CENTRES IN VIEW OF THE PANDEMIC

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Oxygen-starved hospital horror

Head of dept at Batra Hospital among the dead; Fortis Hospital stops new admissions; Max doctor on Covid duty takes his own life

Batra Hospital employees paying respects to Dr R K Himthani | TWITTER

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

DISRUPTION in oxygen supply resulted in the death of 12 Covid-19 patients at Batra Hospital on Saturday. One of the deceased was RK Himthani, head of the gastroenterology department of the hospital.

Medical director of the hospital Dr SCL Gupta said that six of the deceased, including the doctor, were in ICU on high flow of oxygen. The doctor was admitted to the hospital 15-20 days ago.

"There were patients who could have survived, but they could not because of oxygen shortage. The government should take some decision, either close the hospital or admissions. What was the fault of those who died due to shortage of oxygen?" he asked.

The hospital had raised an alarm over depleting stocks around noon, after which AAP MLA Raghav Chadha, who monitors supply to several hospitals in the city, said the gas was reaching the hospital. "Our SOS cryogenic tanker carrying Liquid Medical Oxygen is reaching Batra Hospital within 5 minutes. Their regular supplier of oxygen has defaulted yet again due to alleged 'lack of oxygen supplies' and is being pulled up," he tweeted.

Gupta said they had informed authorities about the lack of oxygen in the morning when they had 2,500 litres left. Around 12.30 pm, hospital authorities claimed they had run out of oxygen. The tanker arrived at 1.35 pm, they added.

Expressing grief, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal once again flagged the issue of short supply to Delhi. "Their lives could have been saved by giving them oxygen on time. Delhi should get its quota of oxygen. Can't see our people dying like this. Delhi needs 976 tonnes of oxygen, but it received only 312 tonnes yesterday. How will Delhi breathe in such a less amount of oxygen?" his tweet in Hindi said.

NATIONWIDE	APRIL 30	MAY 1
Fresh cases	3,86,452	4,01,993
Recoveries	2,97,540	2,99,988
Deaths	3,498	3,523

Other hospitals in the city also sent out messages about oxygen shortage on Saturday. Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj stopped taking admissions due to shortage. Sehgal Neo hospital in Paschim Vihar, Sant Parmanand Hospital in Civil Lines, Bhagat Chandra Hospital (Palam) and MD City Hospital of Model Town also sought help.

Meanwhile, a 35-year-old resident doctor at Delhi's Max Hospital died by suicide on Saturday. Dr Vivek Rai was on Covid duty and was reportedly under stress. "He was frustrated watching people die despite his best efforts," tweeted former IMA chief Dr Ravi Wankhedkar. Police said the suicide note cited no reason.

18 DIE IN GUJARAT HOSPITAL BLAZE

Bharuch: At least 18 people, including 16 Covid patients, died in a fire at a hospital at Bharuch in Gujarat on Saturday. The victims were either charred to death or died due to suffocation after a suspected short-circuit sparked the blaze at Patel Welfare Hospital

Water has gone above head, give oxygen now: Delhi HC to Centre

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

TAKING a stern tone over Delhi not getting its due share of medical oxygen, the Delhi High Court on Saturday told the Centre to arrange its full quota by whatever means or face action.

"Water has gone above the head. You have to arrange everything now. You have made the allocations. You have to fulfill it. Eight lives have been lost," a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said, while referring to Batra Hospital's reported loss of lives, including that of a doctor, after oxygen supply stopped for 80 minutes on Saturday. The number has since risen to 12.

"We direct the Centre to ensure that Delhi receives its 490 MT today by whatever means. It falls on the Centre to arrange tankers as well. If this is not implemented, we may even consider initiating contempt proceedings," the HC said. During the hearing, senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing for the Delhi government, stated that while Delhi's demand was 700 MT, but 490 MT has been allocated, of which the suppliers had made a voluntary commitment to supply 445MT.

"Our tankers are not given priority. There is no timing, schedule given to us. We are dealing in SoS even today. My officers will have a mental breakdown," Mehta told the bench. "Enough is enough. No one is asking for more than allocated. If you can't supply the allocation today, we will see your explanation on Monday," the HC said, while refusing the Centre time to explain the crisis. The court also sought data with respect to daily Covid-19 admissions and discharges from all hospitals in Delhi starting April 1. The order was passed after the court observed that while the recovery rate was high, there appeared to be choking of beds. "Every day a substantial number of beds should become available. But that does not appear to be happening. Patients who require hospitalisation with oxygen support should normally be in a position to leave within 8-10 days subject to their condition," the court said.

4L Active cases in Karnataka now; Jump in deaths too

FROM ACROSS THE STATE

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa says 4,000 ICU beds will be set up in Bengaluru

Biocon to start producing Remdesivir at the Belagavi-based Sri Anand Life Science unit

BJP MLC A H Vishwanath demands complete lockdown to contain the spread of Covid-19

A dedicated website providing details about Covid hospitals in Belagavi has been launched

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE number of active Covid-19 cases in Karnataka crossed the four-lakh mark on Saturday with the number of patients currently under treatment totaling 4,05,068. The figures went up with a single-day addition of 40,990 fresh cases a day after recording its highest-ever day's jump with 48,296 added on Friday.

The state also recorded its highest number of deaths in a single day at 271, up from 217 on Friday. With this, the Covid-19 death toll has now gone up to 15,794 from 15,523 the previous day.

On the other hand, the state also recorded its highest discharges in a single day at 18,341, a notable jump from 14,884 the previous day. However, the state's positivity rate — the number of people testing positive per 100 tests — has crossed the 6 per cent mark, and now stands at 6.06 per cent, up from 5.95 per cent on Friday. The total number of patients the state has recorded so far since the pandemic broke out here on March 8, 2020, is 15,64,132. This number was 15,23,142 on Friday.

STATEWIDE	APRIL 30	MAY 1
Fresh cases	48,296	40,990
Recoveries	14,884	18,341
Deaths	217	271

The mortality rate too has been consistently declining, and has come down to 1 per cent. Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar had mentioned earlier on during the pandemic that the State Government's aim was to bring the mortality rate in the state to below 1 per cent and keep it at a minimum below that mark. It was 1.01 per cent on Friday.

The recovery rate, corresponding to the surge in cases, has now fallen to 73.09 per cent from 73.85 per cent the previous day.

Bengaluru Urban district, on its part, added a relatively high number of cases at 19,353, a day after it added a record high of 26,756 cases.

2 DIE IN KALABURAGI AFTER HOSPITAL RUNS OUT OF O_2

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Kalaburagi

TWO Covid patients, who were admitted at the KBN Hospital here a few days ago, died allegedly due to non-availability of oxygen in time to save them, hospital Medical Superintendent Dr Moinuddin disclosed on Saturday.

Speaking to TNIE, Dr Moinuddin said that first patient died around 7 pm and second about an hour later. Both due to shortage of oxygen cylinders, the hospital has stopped admitting Covid patients since a couple of days, he rued. On Saturday, oxygen cylinders were available in the hospital and when they got exhausted, the staff disconnected the pipes to replace the cylinders. During the process, both patients died, according to Moinuddin. When the attendants of the patients came to know that their relatives have died, they tried to assault the staff who ran away to protect themselves, eyewitnesses said.

Meanwhile, Kalaburagi DC V V Jyothsna told TNIE that she had received initial information that three people had died due to shortage of Oxygen, but the number of the deaths is yet to be ascertained. The DC claimed that KBN Hospital has not sent any requisition for oxygen cylinders. The hospital is also not admitting Covid patients referred by the District Government Hospital. Even then, the district administration has provided 10 oxygen cylinders to the hospital. There is no shortage of cylinders in Kalaburagi as on date, she stressed. The District Expert Committee on Covid will visit the hospital and inquire into the cause of death and find out whether the patients died due to oxygen shortage or mismanagement. If it is established that there was negligence, action will be taken, she said.

Dull start to Phase-3 vax as jab shortage persists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE vaccination programme for all adults got off to a slow start on Saturday with many states skipping the launch date and others doing a symbolic vaccination drive due to an acute shortage of doses. While some states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka kicked off the inoculation drive for the 18-44 years group in a small way at limited centres, Kerala said its launch will be delayed by a few days due to shortage of vaccines.

In Delhi, vaccination for this group was carried out only at one vaccination centre, with CM Arvind Kejriwal saying that the large-scale distribution of doses will start only on Monday.

Chhattisgarh administered doses to only 1,693 people in that age group till 7 pm on Saturday, while Odisha vaccinated just 96 people in Bhubaneswar in a "symbolic dry run". In Jharkhand, the government said it will announce fresh dates for the jabs once they reach the state. Chief Minister Hemant Soren is seeking at least 50 lakh doses.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said, "The vaccination for those above 18 will be delayed by a few days. As efforts are on to procure vaccines from manufacturers, those in the 18 plus category cannot be given the jabs now."

Meanwhile, the first batch of the Russian Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V arrived in Hyderabad. The first lot contains 1.5 lakh doses, which works on the principle of delivering a weakened part of the coronavirus using an adenovirus vector, similar to how Covishield functions, that triggers an immune response in the body. The vaccine has shown an efficacy of over 90% in clinical trials.

A young woman gets a vaccine shot in Mumbai on Saturday | PTI

JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

April 29
20,84,931 doses

April 30
26,08,948 doses

TOTAL DOSES: 15,48,54,096

Token start: Only 35 in 18+ group get jabs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

AMID a shortage of vaccines, a symbolic start was given to the vaccination drive for the 18-44 year age group in Karnataka on Saturday with only some beneficiaries taking the shot. However, with many hospitals and primary health centres not starting the drive, many were asked to come back as late as June.

Even though Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar had pointed out that the fourth phase of vaccination is not bound to start from May 1, some hospitals which had stocks have kickstarted the drive. On Saturday, Yediyurappa symbolically launched the drive at a government hospital wherein 26-year-old Pooja C was one of the first ones in the 18-44 age bracket to get vaccinated in the state. "I took the Covishield vaccine at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Hospital in Shivajinagar. I'm privileged to be among the first ones. I want everyone to come forward and get their shot and fight the pandemic," she said.

CONTINUED ON: P5

EXPRESS READ

GST COLLECTIONS HIT RECORD HIGH

NEW DELHI: GST collections crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark for the seventh month in a row and touched a record high of over ₹1.41 lakh crore in April, indicating economic recovery, the Finance Ministry said on Saturday. The GST collections, which directly reflect the state of economic activity, in April are 14% higher than ₹1.23 lakh crore mopped up in March. P10

INTERVIEW

'Deploy O_2 equipment judiciously'

Dr Giridhar Babu, epidemiologist at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, says the Covid-19 situation is grim now, especially since the capacity of critical beds is near maximum utilisation. It is important to redistribute oxygen concentrators, procure new ones and deploy them in most PHCs and maternity homes. Having more concentrators as the first point of care, will provide support to many people in moderate distress, he suggests | P4

NEVERENDING CRISIS

As dead bodies pile up, firewood for pyre runs out

People in PPE kits perform the last rites of their loved ones who died from Covid-19, amidst multiple pyres at Giddenahalli, in Bengaluru on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

FIRST, it was the lack of space. Now, with more and more bodies of Covid victims piling up at cremation grounds each day, the authorities are now faced with another problem - finding enough firewood for the pyres. The government has created three makeshift crematoria in and around Bengaluru, apart from the existing ones.

To cremate a body, about one-and-half tons of firewood is required. Officials from Karnataka Forest Department and the BBMP have expressed concerns over the shortage of wood as there is only about 150 tons of it left with the BBMP Forest Cell.

The State Government opened three makeshift crematoria, where, in the last 10 days, about 200 tons of wood has been used. "For one pyre, about 1,300- 1,500 kg of wood is needed. On an average, 42 bodies are being cremated daily at one site. At this rate, we are worried that we will be left with no wood and we will have no option but to axe trees," said a BBMP official. The government is also procuring wood from the Forest Department, but at a price. Officials from Karnataka Forest Industries Corporation said, "The government wanted wood immediately and we did not have the suitable type (with high calorific value, like Eucalyptus or Casasurina). Since we are only facilitators, we coordinated with suppliers and contractors," said a senior Forest Department official. P4

BENGALURU'S CREMATORIUMS, BURIAL GROUNDS FEEL THE HEAT

With Bengaluru Urban district witnessing an increase in Covid fatalities over the past few weeks, the situation at the city's crematoriums and burial grounds is also grim. A long queue of ambulances carrying bodies can be seen waiting for hours. Volunteers say that the scene has worsened in the past two weeks | P4

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS | BRIGHTSIDE

ALMANAC TODAY
Sunday : 02/05/2021 • Year: Plava • Ayana: Uttharayana
Ritu: Vasantha • Masa: Chaitra • Paksha: Krishna • Tithi: Sashti 8.13 pm
Nakshatra: Purvashada 2.10 pm • Moon in Makara Rashi • Rahukaala: 04:30 pm to 06:00 pm
Gulikakala: 03:00 pm to 04:30 pm • Yamaganda: 12:00 pm to 01:30 pm

WEATHER
MIN 22°C | MAX 33°C
FORECAST
Scattered clouds

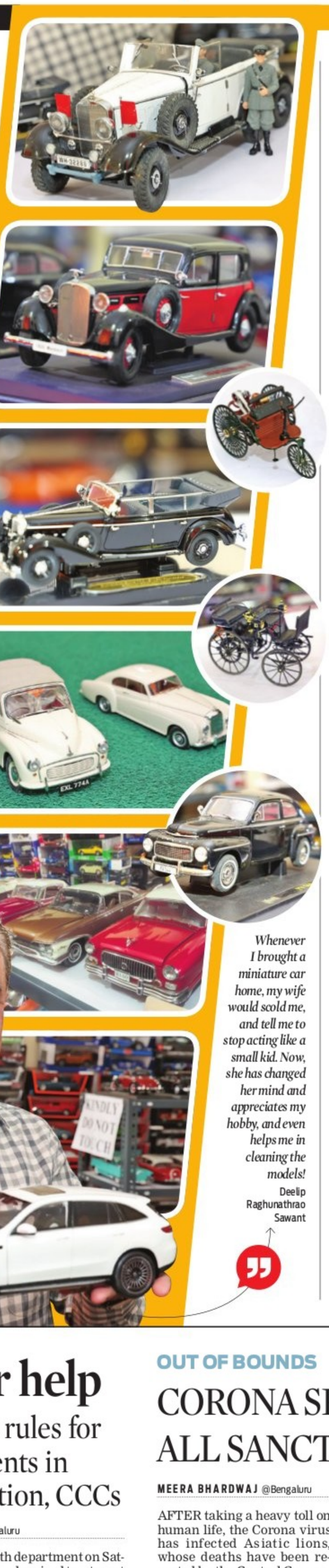
Sunrise 5.58 am
Sunset 6.34 pm
Moonrise 11.50 am
Moonset 10.58 am

02 BENGALURU | SUNDAY 02.05.2021 | newindianexpress.com

Deelip Sawant's collection of miniature scale cars - from vintage models to supercars — is an expression of his fascination and passion for hot wheels

Deelip Sawant's collection of antique cars on display in his house in Hindwadi in Belagavi

GOD OF SMALL WHEELS



Whenever I brought a miniature car home, my wife would scold me, and tell me to stop acting like a small kid. Now, she has changed her mind and appreciates my hobby, and even helps me in cleaning the models!
Deelip Raghunathrao Sawant

SUNIL PATIL @ BELAGAVI

SO WHAT if Deelip Raghunathrao Sawant is 63. And so what if his cars are miniature models. His passion for hot wheels is as deep and red-hot as that of a youngster. For Deelip, retirement is a time when he can pursue his hobbies, craft his dreams into reality, and enjoy life.

Deelip, who owns a books and stationery store in Belagavi, was fascinated by cars and motorcycles since childhood. His choice of toy was always the miniature car, and he is now the proud owner of a stunning collection of over 1,600 models.

From the world's first car, the Benz Patent-Motorwagen by Carl Benz to the modern Ferrari, Deelip has spent the past two decades painstakingly collecting all the miniatures he could.

And he knows his cars. He shows the small detailing such as nylon seats, seat belts with buckles, doors, bonnets, luggage space and steering in the diecast scale models of various brands. He has paid anywhere from Rs 100 to Rs 30,000 for each.

Deelip remembers that he bought his first miniature Milton from Commercial Street in Bengaluru, when he was in Class 8. "I couldn't pursue my hobby as my focus was on education, career and family, and then I was given the responsibility of my father's business. But my love for miniature cars never faded and I rediscovered my hobby in 2009. I had been to Chennai for my son's visa, and there, I got attracted to a store where I couldn't resist buying the Bugatti Atlantic," he says.

When his sons Dushyant and Darshan settled abroad, he decided to give his hobby some time. Today, he has 1,691 diecast scale models of cars, motorcycles, scooters, ambulances, fire engines, harvesters, tractors, even military vehicles. From vintage and classics to Mercedez Benz, Bugatti, Lamborghini, Tata, Mahindra, Rolls Royce, Ford, Suzuki, Toyota and many other brands. He also has motorcycle models of Harley-Davidson, Ducati, Suzuki, Yamaha, Royal Enfield, Kawasaki and Honda.

With great love, Deelip shows his collection of the James Bond, Batman and Fast and Furious series, those used by the Presidents of America, France and other countries. He also collected cars used by Adolf Hitler, besides antiques such as the Opel Motowagon of the year 1899, Mercedez Benz Simplex of 1902 and even India's own Tata Nano. "I have a car manufactured in every decade in the past 130 years. The Benz Universal 600 is my favourite," he says. Deelip has taken pains to collect the first cars invented across the world and in India. He proudly showed the first three-wheeler Patent-Motowagen invented by Carl and Bertha Benz in Germany in 1885, and the Moto Carriage by Diamler in 1886.

Hindustan Motors, founded in 1940, started production in 1947, and came up with the Ambassador. Premier Automobile Ltd tied up with Chrysler, which brought in the Chrysler, Dodge and Fiat cars to India, says Deelip. The first cars hit Indian roads in (then) Calcutta in 1897, and the next year, three cars were imported again in 1898. Three Parsis, including Jamsetji Tata, brought cars to Mumbai.

Two years ago, Deelip built a 400sqft room on the first floor of his house in Hindwadi to give sufficient space to exhibit his collection. "In India, people's mindset is that miniature cars are toys, but it is a hobby of adults and car enthusiasts in the West and Far East nations. These are replicas built to a 1/18, 1/24, 1/43 or 1/83 scale of the actual car, besides different other sizes. Whenever I brought a miniature car home, my wife would scold me, and tell me to stop acting like a small kid. Now, she has changed her mind and appreciates my hobby, and even helps me in cleaning the models!" he says.

Wife Shobha did think that Deelip had a childish side to him. "I would scold him for spending money on these cars, and thought he was being kiddish. It was okay until he got a few models, which I thought looked good in the showcase, but would get angry when he started buying more and more. When we would go abroad to meet our sons, Deelip would slip off to diecast scale car shops. I say that we could have bought two or three Mercedes Benz cars in the amount he has spent," jokes Shobha.

Vipul Jadhav, owner of Shri Laxmi Toys Centre in Belagavi, said, "Deelip uncle used to buy diecast scale models from my father for two decades, and now, he buys them from me. He is highly passionate about his hobby, and many people ask about him, he is famous."

Deelip is not alone. There are other enthusiasts who bond over their models and even have a WhatsApp group to discuss and share information. "I feel proud that I have the biggest collection of miniatures in North Karnataka, and I dream of setting a new record."

Giving back to SOCIETY

TUSHAR A MAJUKAR @Belagavi

A GROUP of people led by an alumnus of a 100-year-old school in Belagavi district are fighting for the survival of the institution which has educated hundreds of young minds.

The Cantonment Marathi and Urdu Medium School was started in 1920 in Belgaum Cantonment by the British to educate the children of army personnel and residents. But today, the around 80 per cent of children attending the school are those of civilians, while the rest are the wards of defence personnel and others living in the cantonment area.

Since the school is located in the cantonment, it is run by the Belgaum Cantonment Board. The board's Chief Executive Office Barchaswa said that Urdu medium schooling was also introduced the same year that the Marathi medium school was set up. In 2010, the board introduced English medium instruction as well, in keeping with the times.

Until 1979, the Karnataka government provided grants to run the school, which educates children for a minimal fee and also provides medical care, Barchaswa says. At present, the board requires Rs 3 crore to meet the school's expenses, including staff salaries. He recently approached officers in the state government regarding financial assistance and expects a favourable response.

In the meanwhile, a number of people, lead by school alumnus Rohit Deshpande, are busy doing their bit for the school.

"It is time for successful alumni to provide 'guru dakshina' to their school which helped them reach the heights of success. We should contribute to the development of school and turn it into one for which people queue up for admission," says Rohit Deshpande, who owns several vehicle dealerships in Belagavi.

Rohit and several people he has reached out to, have raised money for the painting of the school as it enters its 101st year. The 30-strong staff strength too contributed towards the celebrations. The group also plans to buy furniture – desks and benches – and other equipment such as blackboards for when schools reopen. In the meanwhile, Rohit is trying to get in touch with other people who studied in the school.

It is time for successful alumni to provide 'guru dakshina' to their school which helped them reach the heights of success. We should contribute to the development of school and turn it into one for which people queue up for admission
Rohit Deshpande

Prashant Birje, Principal, Cantonment Marathi Medium School, said that several alumni including Dr Ravidas Naik, a scientist at the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research in Goa and retired Capt Prakash Zende had contacted him with regard to welfare activity for the school.

While the 100-year-old school has a reputation for providing a good and affordable education to the region's children, it also has the legacy of providing education to children in their mother tongues, says Barchaswa. Located in the northern part of Karnataka, Belagavi borders Maharashtra. Kannada, Marathi and Urdu have the highest number of speakers in the district, followed by other languages such as Konkani and Telugu.

Around 1,400 children enrolled for Marathi medium instruction in 1970. But by 2016-17, that number dwindled to 109, and has increased only marginally since, says Prashant. In 2017-18, children enrolled for Marathi medium instruction numbered 125, and in 2018-19 it was 254. Urdu medium instruction too has increasingly fewer takers.

Today, children enrolled for Marathi medium instruction number around 400, for Urdu around 200 while around 800 students chose English as the medium of instruction.

BBMP turns to residents, firms for help

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta on Saturday held virtual meetings with resident welfare associations, apartment groups and companies under Nasscom Foundation, to speed up providing facilities for Covid patients.

Gupta appealed to companies to help the corporation and government with oxygen concentrators. The city needs at least 1,000 oxygen concentrators which will help 1,000-2,000 patients. The companies agreed to provide them through Nasscom Foundation at the earliest.

The foundation also agreed to help Gupta with medical equipment, CCCs and other facilities, like teleconsultation and telemedicine for those in home isolation, and who need mental and emotional support.

At the meeting with citizens and RWAs, Gupta and BBMP Special Commissioner, Health, Rajendra Cholan, ironed out issues in creating CCCs in apartment complexes. Gupta clarified that CCCs are not makeshift hospitals, but centres with basic facilities providing medical assistance for the asymptomatic, or those with mild symptoms.

He said: "There is no need to rush to hospitals. There is a system in place. With 20,000 cases a day, the process of handling cases has been decentralised. Control rooms are working, there are 500 lines, waiting time is 1 to 1.5 minutes, and doctors are connected to call centres to attend to patients. Callers can give their SRFID number, BU number, mobile number or ICMR number for medical help. For those in makeshift CCCs, the apartment can either directly connect with hospitals or station nurses, and coordinate with zonal commissioners and medical health officers for health updates and feedback."

Gupta said there are 930-odd apartment associations in Bengaluru, and if 30-50 come forward to create CCCs, it will be of great help. Vacant apartments can also be converted into isolation centres, he said, adding that the number of testing labs is also being increased.

Cholan said a discussion will be held on how triaging load can be shared with apartment associations and volunteers at the zonal level. He said a helpdesk has been created in every private hospital, manned by a health officer and war room member who admit patients who come with SRFID or BU number, if their medical condition worsens. Patients can also get admitted with CT scan reports.

Gandhi Bazaar wears a deserted look during the statewide lockdown in Bengaluru on Saturday | SHRIRAM BN

New rules for patients in isolation, CCCs

ENS @Bengaluru

THE health department on Saturday issued revised treatment guidelines for patients in home isolation and in Covid Care Centres (CCCs) or in home care. The revised treatment circular signed by Additional Chief Secretary, health and family welfare department, Jawaid Akhtar, has been issued at a time when BBMP is asking citizens, RWAs, apartment complexes and companies to set up CCCs and help the government in pandemic management.

The guidelines list out the facilities that should be created, and the medicines which should be given to mildly symptomatic or asymptomatic Covid-19 positive patients, besides clinical guidance for adult Covid patients. The revisions have been done based on recommendations by the Ministry of Health, AIIMS-ICMR and RGUHS clinical committee for Covid-19.

The circular stated all medicines prescribed should be taken on the advice of certified doctors and as per prescription.

OUT OF BOUNDS

CORONA SPREADS TO WILDLIFE, ALL SANCTUARIES IN STATE SHUT

MEERA BHARDWAJ @Bengaluru

AFTER taking a heavy toll on human life, the Corona virus has infected Asiatic lions, whose deaths have been reported by the Central Government. The Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change on Friday issued an advisory ordering all sanctuaries, national parks and other protected areas to be shut with immediate effect and till further orders.

Karnataka Forest Department officials said that they had already closed all protected areas for 15 days since the State Government announced Corona Curfew. Taking it forward, an advisory will be sent to all divisions to completely stop people from venturing into forests to stop any transmission of the virus to wildlife as rural areas in the state too have been witnessing a rise in cases, they added.

Sanjay Mohan, PCCF and Head of Forest Force, told The New Indian Express, "In Karnataka, already all safari and tourism activities in protected areas, including Bandipur, Nagarhole, Bhadra, BRT and others, had been stopped when the weekend curfew was announced. We were continuing with these activities during weekdays, but those too were stopped after Corona Curfew was announced. We had received a similar Covid advisory last year, and it will be put in place again with more measures."

He said, "We have already directed the field staff to be extra vigilant, observe animals for any weakness and take strict anti-poaching measures as during last year's lockdown, poaching and hunting activities had increased on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border. People in the vicinity of protected areas will be stopped from going into forests as they may spread the virus to wildlife. Last week, we took up the vaccination drive for our staff in coordination with district officials. Only the frontline staff are on the field, while all other non-essential employees are working from home."

Centre's advisory

The Centre's advisory on Friday stated that there are reports of transmission from both symptomatic and asymptomatic patients to wildlife, and officials should be Covid negative when deputed on field duties and should maintain Covid-appropriate behavior.

Rakesh Kumar Jagenia, DIGF (Wildlife), MoEF&CC, stressed, "There was a need to take immediate preventive measures to stop the transmission of the virus and also reduce the human-wildlife interface. All states have to constitute a Task Force or Rapid Action Force with field managers, vets and field staff to manage the situation quickly and also set up essential services for emergency treatment of animals and their safe release back into the wild."

Another tiger death

A young male tiger was found dead in the Tanigebail range of Bhadra Tiger Reserve on Friday. The carcass was found near the old Maharaja Guesthouse Road in shola forests of Kemmangundi section. After its postmortem, forest officials said that it was a young animal and had died after a territorial fight with another tiger.

'Complete lockdown only answer to Covid' Veteran leader A H Vishwanath has urged the government to go for a complete lockdown to break the second wave of Covid-19 that has hit health and normal life hard. He said the curfew relaxations from 6am to 10am has ended up in a mess, with the public crowding to buy essentials

As situation turns grim, state govt scrambles to ramp up health infra

4,000 ICU beds to be added, MBBS students to be deployed on Covid-19 duty

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

WITH crippling shortage of oxygenated and ICU beds, the State Government is now scrambling to increase the number of beds and to provide financial assistance to private medical college hospitals to ramp up their infrastructure.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, who held on-site meeting with the top management of private hospitals on Saturday, said 4,000 ICU beds will be set up in Bengaluru immediately to reduce the caseload on existing hospitals.

Government sources said that these ICU beds will come up in the next two to three weeks, taking the total number of such beds in the state to 7,000. However, given the surge in Covid numbers -- the state reported 40,990 cases on Saturday -- it is not clear whether it will be enough to tackle the situation, which is turning grimmer by the day.

The State Government appointed senior IPS officer Dr PS Harsha, Commissioner of Information and Public Relations, as the Nodal Officer to set up 500 ICU beds in each of the eight BBMP zones in Bengaluru on a war-footing.

The Chief Minister, after visiting MS Ramaiah and KIMS hospitals to hold discussion on increasing the number of beds, said MS Ramaiah agreed to reserve 850 beds, including 450 oxygen and ICU beds, while KIMS would reserve 133 oxygen beds. The MS Ramaiah Hospital management also responded positively to the request to set up makeshift facilities at hostels and choultries near the hospital to treat Covid patients, the CM said.

The government also decided to use the services of final-year MBBS and nursing students to fight the pandemic and to give them grace marks and appropriate incentives. It decided to use the services of final-year Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Dental, Ayush and Hospital management students and consider the possibility of allowing students who have graduated abroad to register with the Karnataka Medical Council to let them treat Covid patients. If students are deployed on Covid duty, they will be vaccinated on priority.

The government decided to increase the incentives given to doctors and to bear the cost of treatment of doctors and medical staff if they are infected.

The CM's meeting with the private hospital management was attended by Dr Devi Shetty of Narayan Hrudayalaya, Dr Jayaram of MS Ramaiah Hospital, DyCM Dr CN Ashwath Narayan, Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar and others.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa holds a meeting with ministers and doctors of leading private hospitals in Bengaluru on Saturday | EXPRESS

OTHER DECISIONS

- Converting hotels into stepdown hospitals with oxygenated beds by using oxygen concentrators
- Converting beds with centralised oxygen support to ICU beds
- Converting general beds at medical college hospitals into oxygenated beds, extending funds to set up oxygen generation plants
- Strengthening telemedicine facilities to treat patients under home isolation
- Audit the use of oxygen and Remdesivir to avoid unnecessary usage
- Constitute an expert committee to effectively tackle third wave of the pandemic

ICU beds will come up in the next two to three weeks, taking the total number of such beds in the state to 7,000

Sources

ULB polls loss: Voters press warning bell for saffron party

K SHIVA KUMAR @Mysuru

THE Karnataka BJP and Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, who successfully implemented Operation Lotus, won by-elections and were doing well in village panchayats, were delivered a big jolt by voters in the Urban Local Body elections on Friday.

Over the past two years, the party had managed to win every election and by-election, even winning KR Pet, considered a Vokkaliga bastion.

Though it's considered to be a party of urbanites and businessmen, the BJP could win only in Madikeri, a party stronghold for more than a decade. That the BJP failed in Theerthahalli -- in Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa's home turf Shivamogga -- and Ballari -- the fortress of the Reddy brothers and Social Welfare Minister Minister Sriramulu -- has raised eyebrows, and much concern in BJP circles. Although ministers K S Eshwarappa, Sriramulu, MP B Y Raghavendra and others had aggressively campaigned from the front, they lost the ULBs decisively to the Congress.

This comes as a booster for the Congress, ahead of the bypoll verdict on Sunday. It comfortably managed to win Ballari, Ramanagara -- the stronghold of JDS Chief H D Kumaraswamy -- Belur, Bidar and Gudibande. The JDS won Channapatna and Vijayapura. The Congress won 119 out of 266 seats, JDS bagged 67 and BJP won 54 seats.

This should come as a warning bell for the BJP from the common man, who is facing the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic, widely seen as being mismanaged by the Yediyurappa government, besides a lack of governance.

The alarming surge in Covid cases due to failure to provide facilities like beds, oxygen supply, ventilators and complete insensitivity in the style of functioning in the past six months, when Yediyurappa was busy accommodating rebels in his cabinet, and ministerial aspirants were trying to get plum portfolios.

KPCC Working President R Dhruvanarayan said that citizens have pushed BJP to the wall and the results of the elections are being seen as an expression of wrath against the party and CM Yediyurappa. Social media platforms are full of stories of Covid patients' struggle and the agony of families as they run around for beds and oxygen, there is public outrage against the government that has made an impact on urban voters, considered to be strong supporters of thje BJP, he said, confident that the bypolls will reflect similar results.

Political pundits feel these trends will also have an impact on upcoming Taluk and Zilla Panchayat polls, as the Congress and JDS will seek to take advantage of the anger among simmering in the people. It should not be a surprise in Belagavi Lok Sabha seat and the assembly seats of Maski and Basavakalyan swing to the Opposition parties.

BJP leader G Madhusudhan said the ULB polls are not a setback to the party as these are not traditional BJP pockets, and they cannot do too well in Vokkaliga and Muslim dominated towns. He said people have high expectations in Covid times, and expect healthcare and vaccines to be free.

He said that local issues, caste and family equations and ward level leadership decide the results of local bodies elections, and clarified that it will not hamper his party's prospects in Zilla Panchayat polls.

A few BJP leaders, though, pleading anonymity, felt it is a wake-up call for the BJP and the high command to put governance in order and take a serious look into the issues plaguing the Karnataka BJP unit. Since assembly elections are still two years away, the party leadership has time to introspect and make changes, they said.

BYELECTION RESULTS: RED-LETTER DAY FOR BJP, CONG TODAY

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Belagavi

THE much-awaited results of the three bypolls to Belagavi Lok Sabha seat, Maski and Basavakalyan assembly segments, to be declared on Sunday, are not crucial only for the BJP but also Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, whose leadership has come under the scanner in recent times, with his own party leaders trying to unseat him.

With a neck-and-neck clash predicted between the BJP and Congress in all three constituencies, the results are expected to give a massive boost to the winning side, whether it is BJP or Congress. At a time when Yediyurappa and his party are struggling to cope with the raging pandemic in the state, many in BJP feel a victory in at least two seats, including Belagavi, will bolster the party's position.

While BJP leaders are confident that people in all three constituencies, where a majority of voters are Lingayats, will rally behind Yediyurappa, the Congress leadership predicts it will win all three seats, claiming the ruling government has failed on all fronts.

The BJP is so desperate to grab the three seats, that despite being down with severe Covid-19 symptoms, the Chief Minister held three whirlwind campaigns in Belagavi, and held rallies back to back.

Belagavi parliamentary constituency has been a stronghold of the BJP, with late Suresh Angadi, former Union Minister of State for Railways, winning the seat four times, starting from 2004. In an attempt to retain the seat with the sympathy factor, the BJP fielded his wife Mangala Angadi. On the other side, the Congress is desperate to regain Belagavi, which was once its stronghold. The party fielded warhorse Satish Jarkiholi against the inexperienced Mangala, and hopes to get back its lost bastion.

Senior Congress leader BL Shankar said, "The outcome of the three bypolls is important for the party as it will help send across a positive message ahead of elections to the ZP, TP and Legislative Council." Satish Jarkiholi said the BJP had failed to deliver on all fronts, and people would vote for the Congress.

RPD College premises being sanitised by corporation staff on the eve of counting of votes in Belagavi on Saturday | EXPRESS

In the last assembly election in Maski, the BJP lost to Congress by merely 213 votes, and the bypoll is expected to produce another thrilling result. After Pratapgouda Patil, who was Congress candidate last time, switched to BJP via Operation Lotus, and Basangouda Turvihal quit BJP and joined the Congress, the clash has become even more interesting. Both parties had launched a high-decibel campaign in Maski.

KPCC Working President Eshwar Khandre said, "The people are disappointed with the government's performance on all fronts. The Yediyurappa government neglected the Kalyan Karnataka region and people will teach them a lesson. We will win all three seats and the results will be a morale booster for the party cadre."

Basavakalyan is also expected to throw up an interesting result, with the Congress fielding Mala Narayan Rao, wife of late MLA Narayan Rao, whose death necessitated the bypoll. The BJP fielded Sharanu Salgar, ignoring former MLA Mallikarjun Khuba, who was a strong aspirant. The BJP could not stop Khuba from entering the fray as a party rebel, but the Yediyurappa camp has worked hard to ensure the party votes don't split.

WATCH YOUNG INDIA DEBATE THEIR HEARTS OUT

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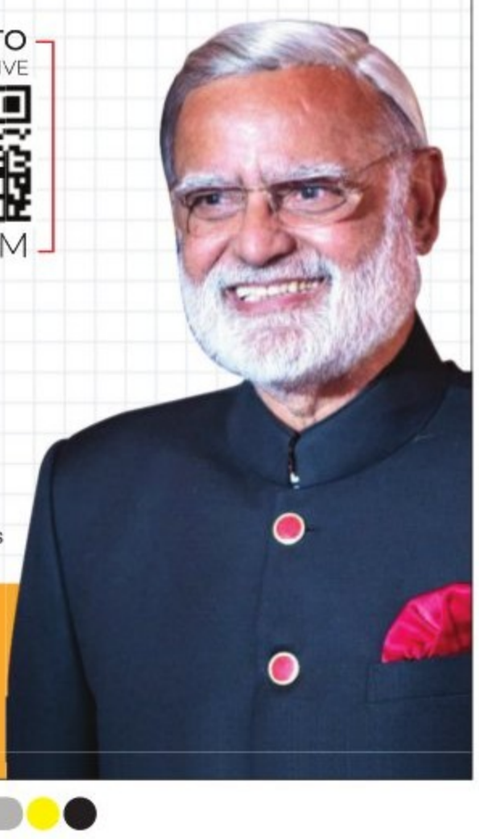
JUDGE: Prabhu Chawla
Editorial Director, The New Indian Express



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TRACKING COVID-19

SPEED AND RISE OF COVID-19 CASES IN KARNATAKA

40,990 CASES REPORTED TODAY

48,296 CASES REPORTED YESTERDAY

TALLY STANDS AT

TODAY	15,64,132
YESTERDAY	15,23,142

DEATHS

TODAY	YESTERDAY
271	217

DISCHARGES

TODAY	YESTERDAY
18,341	14,884

ACTIVE CASES

TODAY	YESTERDAY
4,05,068	3,82,690

POSITIVITY RATE

TODAY	6.06
YESTERDAY	5.95

MORTALITY RATE

TODAY	1.00
YESTERDAY	1.01

RECOVERY RATE

TODAY	73.09
YESTERDAY	73.85

The first Covid-19 case in Karnataka was reported on March 8, 2020. Since then until May 1, 2021, a total of 15,64,132 cases have been reported in 1 year and 53 days...

97,55,976 Number of people vaccinated across the state

VACCINATION DRIVE STATUS

Health care workers 1st dose	6,78,724
Health care workers 2nd dose	4,33,061
Frontline workers 1st dose	3,86,745
Frontline workers 2nd dose	1,47,780
Age 45-60 1st dose	35,68,965
Age 45-60 2nd dose	2,72,426
Above 60 1st dose	35,29,489
Above 60 2nd dose	7,38,751
Age 18-45 1st dose (STARTED TODAY)	35

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

'STATE GOVT CAN'T UPGRADE HEALTH INFRA OVERNIGHT'

IFFATH FATHIMA @Bengaluru

THE Corona Curfew will help flatten the Covid curve over the next 14 days, **Dr Giridhar Babu**, epidemiologist at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, assured us. Meanwhile, bigger spaces, like choultries, should be used to accommodate the increasing number of patients, and services of post-graduate medical and Ayush students should be used to tackle the second wave, he added, in an interview with *The New Sunday Express*. Excerpts:

How grim is the Covid situation in Karnataka?

The situation is grim as of now with critical beds near maximum utilisation. However, because of the Janata Curfew, there could be some relief over the next 14 days. The current surge is a reflection of the infection and its transmission nearly 7-14 days ago. We are more likely to see a lag time between the surge in cases and surge in deaths. In the first wave, the lag time was around 14-17 days. But it might be shorter in the second wave because of the strain on the health system. The earlier projection stated that peak would be somewhere in the second or third week of May, but with Janata Curfew, we hope to see flattening of the peak.

How can the health infrastructure be upgraded? What is the most urgent need to solve the problem of shortage of skilled medical manpower?

The capacity can't be improved overnight. It is important to redistribute the resources, especially oxygen concentrators and other essential supplies. It is better to procure new concentrators and deploy them in most of the primary health centres and maternity homes. Having more oxygen concentrators at the first point of care can help more people with mild to moderate distress before they could be referred to facilities with better oxygen supplementation. Also, triage has to occur on prioritising who needs supportive therapy and who needs aggressive therapy in terms of oxygen supplementation. Also, large areas, such as marriage halls, should be converted into triage facilities with more oxygen concentrators. At the same time, a few general hospitals are not utilised in BBMP limits, which should be put to use immediately.

There is an indiscriminate use of Remdesivir, creating an artificial demand as many people are trying to obtain it at the same time. Also its production had stopped for some time earlier, resulting in shortage

Dr Giridhar Babu

Are measures taken by the State Government adequate? What can be done to bring cases down?

No government can immediately step up resources when they are hit with such an unprecedented rise in cases. New York, London and other parts of Europe too faced a similar situation. The only difference is that the developed countries had better infrastructure. Right now, more than the government, it is time for all in society to regroup and help save as many lives as possible. Strengthening the public healthcare systems too is imperative. We need more beds, doctors and, importantly, many more nurses. To ensure that, we cannot resort to temporary measures. It is time we spent a greater allocation on public health.

What is the issue with Remdesivir? While there is a talk about shortage, experts say that it is not effective in treating Covid...

Remdesivir is indicated only for hospitalised patients with severe Covid (defined as patients with SpO2 of 94 per cent on room air or patients who require supplemental oxygen). But there is an indiscriminate use of Remdesivir, creating an artificial demand as many people are trying to obtain the drug at the same time. Also its production had stopped for some time earlier, resulting in shortage. This is not a major concern in the care of Covid patients. The real lifesaving measures are timely provision of oxygen support and steroids.

What do you feel people should do to ensure the Covid surge dies down?

Action at the individual and community level is more effective in reducing the transmission in the second wave. Masking is essential whenever we are in closed spaces and it is definitely mandatory when we move out (especially among crowds). In addition, the 3 C approach -- avoiding crowds, avoiding closed spaces and avoiding closed settings, where more people are present -- will help reduce the spread. Finally, vaccination coverage is extremely important to reduce mortality and morbidity in the impending third wave in the winter.

ON LONELY LAST JOURNEY, DIGNITY TOO ABANDONS THE COVID DEAD

TEAM TNIE

IN his famous book, Tuesdays With Morrie, Mitch Albom quotes his old teacher and mentor Morris 'Morrie' S Schwartz: "Death ends a life, not a relationship."

It is because we value relationships that there is immense pain at the loss of a dear one. It is all the more painful when that dear one does not receive a dignified adieu — a thing that has become rampant post death of Covid-19 patients.

Hospitals may have emerged as battlefields for critically ill patients to survive and recover, but a battle lost means a ticket denied for a 'final journey', over fear of the infection spreading. The latter has brought crematoria (mainly) and burial grounds under the scanner, begging for more to accommodate the rising number of Covid-19 dead.

There is a debate in the background that burials are safer than cremations for Covid-19 victims. Family members are discouraged from attending funerals at electrical crematoria due to space constraints, but not so at open-air cremations, although guidelines restrict family members' attendance to five. This made a senior official from Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) say: "It would be ideal if we could bury the Covid-19 deceased as it would be faster and economical too. There is no scientific evidence that buried Covid patients spread the virus. But due to religious sentiments, the government is now creating additional crematoria."

However, in several cases, hospitals are directly sending the dead wrapped in personal protection equipment (PPE) suits to be cremated. Family members are asked not to attend cremations, and are not even informed where their departed family member will be cremated, or when. They are left with just memories, despair, frustration and deep grief.Long queues of the dead, many without family members in attendance, the unending wait, forced the government to add makeshift open-air crematoria to the existing ones to accommodate the rush.

A total of 6,537 people have died so far in Bengaluru, which includes the 162 reported on Saturday -- the highest single-day fatalities. Karnataka overall reported 271 deaths.

There are 12 electric crematoria and 58 burial grounds in Bengaluru. Those handling the crematoria say unofficially, there are totally 108 crematoria and burial grounds, which the government has not maintained, and therefore, not accounted for.

Of the 12 crematoria, seven are exclusively used for the Covid-19 dead. But since the rush there too — with many walk-in cremations — the state government announced the creation of makeshift non-electric crematoria at Tavarekere, Giddenahalli and Mavallipura, where wooden log pyres are being used.

BIG PICTURE

Supervisors at electric crematoria say their systems are better as bodies burn faster. It takes three hours to convert a body to ash. But in case of normal crematoria, including makeshift ones, citizens are allowed to perform some of the last rites, including placing the logs as per rituals. This is the reason why many prefer normal crematoria — and which is why the government is creating additional makeshift ones.

Bengaluru Urban Deputy Commissioner J Manjunatha told The New Sunday Express: "The cremation ground at Tavarekere was created in just three days. Initially, locals were apprehensive and opposed it. But I made them understand that the virus does not survive on the dead, especially when the pyre is burning at temperatures well over 100 degree Celsius. I had to stand near the pyre for an entire day to make people understand."

But officials are in the dark about one thing: The bodies burnt in PPE suits are posing immense danger to those in attendance, as the burning suits emit carcinogenic chemicals, and no assessment was sought from the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board before embarking on this practice.

Meanwhile, in Mysuru, despite a record spike in cases and gradually increasing mortality which touched 13 on Friday, cremations are still carried out at the single electric crematorium on the outskirts of Mysuru city, manned by just two operators. One of them, Mahadev, says he has never seen so many bodies coming to the crematorium.

Additional Deputy Commissioner BS Manjunathaswamy says in addition to the existing one, a long-delayed electric crematorium will be ready in a week's time. And for burial of pandemic victims, a five-acre plot on the city outskirts at Ramanahalli has been handed over to Mysuru City Corporation. But that, he admits, is only for the current mortality rate -- if deaths rise substantially, there could be a problem.

Compared to Bengaluru, Covid deaths in Dharwad district are few. On Friday, the district reported seven deaths, the highest in a day. As the death rate is low, Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC) is helping the deceased's families in cremation. HDMC has identified Heggeri graveyard for Covid-19 burials, where trained persons are deployed to handle the final rites. Another graveyard has been identified near the Muslim burial ground in the city centre.

Both Ballari and newly formed Vijayanagara districts together reported the highest single-day deaths of 16.

Ballari city has an electric crematorium for Covid-19 bodies. In other taluks, a burial ground each has been identified by local bodies, and final rites are carried out by the staff.

The lack of adequate space for the dead is a problem that is mainly seen in Bengaluru, and not so much in other parts of the state. For instance, places like Shivamogga city have one crematorium and one special burial ground for performing the last rites of the dead.

In Udupi city, social worker Nithyanand Volakad, observing the ground situation, says, ''Covid victims of Udupi city and surrounding villages are cremated at Indrali crematorium, but the situation is shocking. The deceased's family is forced to bring firewood for the cremation. This is because maintenance of the crematorium has not been assigned to any agency." Kalaburagi resident Santosh, who lost his father to Covid-19, says despite officials being cooperative and having handed over the body after protocols, he and his family members were not allowed to see his father's face, a regular practice during the last rites.

However, in Kalaburagi, none has objected to either burying or cremating the Covid-19 dead. There are seven graveyards in Kalaburagi city, besides one in each village of the district.

The district administration uses electric crematorium for unclaimed bodies. An exclusive graveyard for Covid-19 dead is being readied in Khandadal village on Kalaburagi's outskirts on one acre of land, says District Surgeon of Kalaburagi District Government Hospital Dr Ambaraya Rudrawadi.

Inputs from: Bosky Khanna; Ajith MS; Arunkumar Huralimath; Kiran Balannanavar; Marx Tejaswi; Prajna GR; Ramkrishna Badseshi; Prakash Samaga

BIG PUSH

Biocon ties up with Belagavi firm to produce Remdesivir

SUNIL PATIL @Belagavi

A Belagavi-based pharmaceutical company has been roped in to manufacture 'Remidesvir', which is given to critical Covid patients and is in short supply across the country.

Pharma major Biocon has tied up with Sri Anand Life Sciences to manufacture the life-saving drug at Belagavi. The Central Government has given its approval for Sri Anand to manufacture the drug. It was after Minister for Mines and Geology Murugesh Nirani announced such a manufacturing agreement.

Sri Anand Life Sciences is only the second plant in the state to possess a Lyophilizer machine to freeze-dry drugs. It is engaged in the manufacture of 500 different critical care, life-saving drugs at its plant in Honaga Industrial Area in Belagavi. It also exports injections to five countries, including Brazil.

Company Managing Director Satish Gharge said, "We have the approval from the Drug Controller General of India and Drug controller of the state and both Central and State governments to start the production of Remdesivir. The production will start in the next three to four weeks. The government will monitor the production and supply of this medicine."

Director Aishwarya Gharge said, "Our plant will manufacture 80,000 Remidisvir injections every month and we have over 200 dedicated employees especially for this. Once the medicine is made, 14 days are required for the sterilisation process. It will take at least a month to bring out Remdesivir from our unit. There is a shortage everywhere in the country. We are happy that our company will manufacture the medicine and help in the battle against Covid."

The unit of Sri Anand Life Sciences at Honga Industrial Area in Belagavi

Troubles don't end with death for Covid patients

IFFATH FATHIMA @Bengaluru

Geared up in PPE suits, family members of a person who died of Covid collect wood for the last rites at Giddenahalli in Tavarekere, Bengaluru, on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

WITH an increase in the number of Covid deaths in the state, especially Bengaluru, over the last few weeks, long lines of ambulances are seen at crematoriums and burial grounds.

On Saturday, the state recorded its highest number of Covid deaths at 271. Many volunteers, who help families perform last rites, said that the situation has turned worse over the last two weeks. Relatives have to wait for more than six hours or hold cremations the next day as the facilities are booked to capacity. Not just crematoriums, even at burial grounds there have been 40 funerals a day over the past fortnight, they said.

Khaleel-ur Rahman, a volunteer from Bangalore for Migrants, said, "I have not slept over the last few days. We have to wait for at least six hours to cremate a body. But in the last two days, the waiting period has gone up to 10 hours at crematoriums in Taverekere, Hebbal and Kengeri. Over the last three days, we are seeing an average of 15-20 bodies at crematoriums. It takes about 45 minutes to one hour for a cremation. When we take a body, we get a waiting list number of 25. It takes a long time before our turn comes. We have to wait till then and we cannot even pick up other bodies from hospitals. Many private ambulances charge Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 to wait in queues at the crematorium, while a BBMP ambulance charges only Rs 250. Private operators are making money even in someone's death. Our organisation has two ambulances and we provide a free service."

Usman Sharieff, Secretary, Jumma Masjid Trust Board, said, "For the last fortnight, we are taking at least 45 bodies to Hazrat Khuddus Saheb Qabrastan on Nandidurga Road. We have a large space to bury the bodies, but it seems now we are running out of space. During the first wave, at the peak we saw a maximum of 15 bodies per day, but the second wave has been much worse. It is sad to see these many deaths. We need to ramp up our health infrastructure and save people."

Tanveer Ahmed from the Emergency Response Team, who had carried out 300-plus burials during the first wave, said that with the BBMP allowing open cremations, the issue of crowding could be sorted out, but the number of deaths is too high this time. "At crematoriums in Banashankari, Geddadahalli, Tavarekere and Panathur over 25 bodies are lined up at any time and the process is extremely slow. It is faster at open crematoriums and more such facilities should be opened," he said.

Saqib Idrees from Bangalore for Migrant said, "So many people are dying every day. If the government is reporting lesser numbers, it is because they don't want to show that they are failing in their fight against the pandemic."

I have not slept over the last few days. We have to wait for at least six hours to cremate a body. But in the last two days, the waiting period has gone up to 10 hours at crematoriums

Khaleel-ur Rahman, a volunteer

For the last fortnight, we are taking at least 45 bodies... We have a large space to bury the bodies, but it seems now we are running out of space

Usman Sharieff, Jumma Masjid Trust Board

At crematoriums in Banashankari, Geddadahalli, Tavarekere and Panathur over 25 bodies are lined up at any time and the process is slow

Tanveer Ahmed, Emergency Response Team

If body count goes up, will be forced to axe trees: Officials

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

WHILE the BBMP is supplying the wood free of cost, the contractors are charging the government Rs 4,300 per ton.

"We are aware that the cost is becoming difficult for the government to bear. With the rising Covid-19 and non-Covid deaths, the pressure at crematoria is increasing. So we are also in talks with timber depots to identify logs which can be used for pyre," the forest official added.

The reason for opening non-electric crematoria was because of the long queues for cremation at electric and non-electric crematoria. Though at an electric crematorium, the body is burnt in 3-5 hours, in a wooden pyre, it takes 5-8 hours, depending on the type of wood. The reason why electric crematoria was started by the government was because of hygiene issues, non-availability of wood and quick management. But, in the wake of the pandemic, the government was forced to go back to the traditional method, but availability of wood is becoming a challenge, the BBMP official explained.

"We are now forced to think between environmental issues and government orders of providing wood to crematoria. If bodies keep increasing at this rate, we will be forced to axe trees or buy from contractors, who will also axe trees to meet the demand," the BBMP official said in a tone of helplessness.

BANNED TILL MAY 4

T'Puram dist collector Navjot Khosa has banned all social and political gatherings, meetings, processions and parades in Kerala till May 4 in the wake of second wave of Covid

Denied vax, US citizen wants to get home

Johnny Paul Pierce longed to stay back in Kerala for rest of his life but changed his mind as he was denied vax citing foreign roots

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Vijayawada

NINE months ago he had approached Kerala High Court expressing his wish to stay in Kerala and spend the rest of his life in India. But now 75-year-old US citizen Johnny Paul Pierce is desperate to return to his homeland. The denial of Covid vaccine citing his foreign roots has forced Pierce to change his decision.

It was the rapid spread of the pandemic in the US that prompted him to settle down in Kerala where the number of Covid cases and the case fatality rate was low. But the situation has changed and Kerala has 3.28 lakh active cases now compared to 2,411 on July 7, 2020 when he approached the High Court seeking permission to stay in Kerala. The death toll climbed from 27 to 5,356 on Saturday.

"I have to go back to the US because the Indian Government won't give me COVID vaccine as I am a foreigner," Pierce told TNIE. But he still loves Kerala and the country. "The people in Kerala are wonderful and I will miss India greatly", he said.

Pierce hit the headlines when he approached the Kerala High Court on July 7, 2020 during lockdown seeking a directive to the Union government to permit him to apply for conversion of his tourist visa into a business visa without leaving the country. He came to India on February 26 last year on a tourist visa, which is valid up to January 26, 2025. This is his fifth visit to India as a tourist. The guidelines of the Indian government permit continuous stay for only 180 days for foreigners on tourist visa. But due to the pandemic and travel restrictions, the India government allowed him to continue his stay in the country.

But the High Court had rejected his plea to convert the visa. Pierce has been staying in Vagamon since August 2020. He bought a car to drive himself to the market and hospital during the COVID time. An Indian friend helped him open a bank account and got him a phone and changed the ownership of the car in his name because he can't do that on a tourist visa. "I live on a hill top with the closest neighbours a five-minute walk away. There are only two houses on my street, so I stay isolated. This district is sparsely populated and has low Covid cases," he said.

> I have to go back to the US because the Indian Government won't give me COVID vaccine as I am a foreigner. The people in Kerala are wonderful and I will miss India greatly
>
> Johnny Paul Pierce

Adding to the woes, he has been diagnosed with cancer in March. "I wanted to stay because I learned I have prostate cancer and wanted treatment at a private hospital in Kottayam district. But I don't feel safe going to hospital five times a week for radiation treatment without vaccination for COVID," he said. Peirce's hopes of getting vaccinated vanished as he is a foreign national and does not possess a valid identity card or Aadhaar card. "I contacted three private hospitals in Kerala for vaccination so that I can start cancer treatment here. The hospital authorities contacted the health authorities who replied that the vaccine is only for Indians. It distressing to run around seeking help to get the vaccine and I have lost hope," Pierce said. He will board a Qatar Air flight from Kochi International Airport to Doha at 3 am on Monday.

O_2 from Odisha to reach T'gana on train

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

NEARLY 124.26 metric tonnes of oxygen is on its way to Telangana from Odisha on board the Oxygen Express. Loaded with five tankers, the train has commenced its journey from Angul in Odisha, and is expected to arrive at Secunderabad on Sunday evening.

The five empty tankers were sent to Angul from Secunderabad Cantonment Military Siding on April 28. A second train with four empty tanks were sent to Odisha on Friday, which will return to Telangana in a few days.

The liquid oxygen being transported in these tanks is a cryogenic cargo, which has many limitations, like the maximum speed at which it can be transported, maximum acceleration and deceleration, and loading restrictions.

The route mapping of the train along the green corridor has been done taking all these factors into account.

Empty medical oxygen tankers being sent to Odisha in a cargo flight from the Vijayawada airport on Saturday | EXPRESS

Oxygen Express trains were launched by the Indian Railways to provide safe, secure, hassle-free and fast transportation of oxygen to different parts of the country amid the pandemic.

Legal action against labs refusing to test, charging old rate: Kerala CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @T'Puram

CHIEF Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has warned of legal action against private laboratories which overcharge the public for RT-PCR test for Covid-19 detection.

Though the state government had slashed the test rate from ₹1,700 to ₹500 on Thursday, several laboratories continue with the old rates.

"Some private labs are refusing to conduct RT-PCR tests after the rate revision. The government expects the laboratories to cooperate with the decision and follow the revised rates. The revised tariff of ₹500 is inclusive of the manpower cost and the price of materials used for the test which comes to ₹240. These rates were decided after a detailed study," Pinarayi told mediapersons.

The CM said some labs were encouraging customers to opt for the costly TrueNat test.

"The government cannot accept this as the disease spread is on the rise. We will be forced to take legal action against labs which refuse to do the tests or charging the old rate. We expect them to do the test at the rate fixed by the government," he said.

The chief minister extended May Day greetings to all healthcare workers who dedicated themselves to Covid prevention and are at the forefront of the fight against this pandemic for more than a year now without a break.

As many as 35,636 persons tested positive for the disease on Saturday, the CM said.

The test positivity rate was 24.33%. Two districts---Kozhikode and Ernakulam ---reported more than 5,000 new positive cases. A total of 3.23 lakh persons are currently under treatment. As many as 48 deaths were reported, taking the total death toll in the state to 5,356.

The CM reiterated the priority in vaccination was for second dose. The vaccination for 18-44 age group may be delayed owing to the shortage of vaccine, he said.

"We had decided to vaccinate all people above 45 years by May 30, but it will not be possible as we have not yet received the required vaccine stock. Therefore, immediate steps need to be taken by the Union government to make more vaccines available," he said.

A total of 44 more private hospitals have joined the government's Karunya Aarogya Suraksha Scheme. It would enable the government to bear the medical expenses of more Covid patients seeking treatment in private hospitals. They have been asked to reserve 50% of their beds for Covid treatment.

HC junks plea filed by former KSOU V-C

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court dismissed the petition filed by Prof K Sudha Rao, the former Vice-Chancellor of Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), Mysuru, questioning the criminal proceedings initiated against her for allegedly entering into an MoU with institutions outside the state, permitting them to admit students for various courses.

Justice HP Sandesh dismissed the petition of Prof Rao (76). However, she has been granted the liberty to approach the court after the final chargesheet is filed by the police, if the need arises. The court noted that there is prima facie material to investigate the matter.

The court further added that the allegation in the complaint mentions that an agreement was entered to provide distant education with the institutions outside the state, beyond jurisdiction. Therefore, the matter has to be proved to unearth the crime.

The Registrar of KSOU on November 20, 2019, registered a complaint with Jayalakshmipuram police station in Mysuru against Prof Rao and other former V-Cs, following the directions issued by the Governor, after taking note of the recommendations made in the report submitted by a one-man committee into the alleged irregularities in the varsity.

3, including ambulance driver, killed in accident

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

In a freak accident, three, including an ambulance driver and a patient, were killed after the speeding ambulance they were travelling in struck a truck from behind, and caught fire on the busy Nelamangala highway on Friday.

Five people in the ambulance suffered burns, with three of them succumbing in a hospital on Saturday morning. Locals took the help of a water tanker close by and doused the fire, which had engulfed the ambulance.

The deceased have been identified as Hasina M (41), and her relatives Chandini (24) and Saadiq (23).

Hasina had suffered a stroke and was referred to NIMHANS in Bengaluru. Her relative, Saadiq, an ambulance driver, brought an ambulance to shift her to Bengaluru. They were driving down to the city, when the accident occurred at Edehalli Gate near Nelamangala.

Ventilators lie unused in taluk hospitals, say MLAs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mysuru

WHILE frantic calls for ventilator beds continue to echo in Mysuru, Congress MLAs pointed out that ventilators supplied last year to their taluks are lying unused due to non-availability of staff.

HD Kote MLA Anil Chikkamadu and Hunsur MLA H P Manjunath said they had brought the issue to the notice of the authorities on several occassions, especially to Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar recently, but in vain.

Speaking to reporters after launching the Congress Covid war room in the district, Chikkamadu said that five ventilators were lying unused at the taluk hospital, at a time when patients are being rushed to Mysuru in need of such beds. "We're told they (the ventilators) can only be used after qualified hands are recruited, but when are we going to recruit them? We need to put in all our efforts and not be complacent. Similarly, we asked for physicians, but even this request is pending," he said.

Hunsur MLA Manjunath said that not only the ventilators, but also the CT scan machine that the taluk hospital recently procured is lying unused due to staff shortage. "We see severe shortage of nurses and doctors. As much as 19 of our senior nurses have been promoted to Mysuru, and on top of that unlike the last wave where cases were largely confined to towns, we are seeing more number of cases in villages. We have 14 villages turned into containment zones," said Manjunath.

Narasimharaja MLA Tanveer Sait said that instead of merely setting up beds, the government should ensure that facilities like availability of oxygen and drugs are taken care of.

Capsicum and carrots brought to APMC yard by farmers in Belagavi | EXPRESS

Covid cuts vegetable growers into pieces

Procure veggies, fruits: Farmer leader to govt

MYSURU: With the lockdown and it's restrictions dealing a deadly blow on farmers' earning, Karnataka State Sugarcane Farmers Association president Kurubur Shantakumar said the government should step in to procure vegetables and other yields on a fixed price directly from farmers and distribute it to the public. Speaking to media persons here on Thursday, Shanthakumar said farmers are forced to leave their produce in the fields due to low prices and added that an MSP should be announced for vegetables and fruits as well. "If they can't do this, better they should include farming also in lockdown," he said.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Belagavi

THE long-drawn Covid crisis has taken its toll on the farmers in Belagavi region who are growing vegetables in abundance. The transportation of the massive amount of vegetables from Belagavi to Goa and west-Maharashtra on a regular basis has come to a grinding halt owing to the lockdown like restrictions in both the states.

A wide range of vegetables are being brought to APMC yard in the city and other markets by farmers from various parts of the district, but there have been no takers as expected due to the restrictions imposed by the government as part of the 14-day lockdown till May 12.

Although facilities have been provided at APMC yard to the farmers to market their produce between 6 am and 10 am everyday, the restrictions on timings is hindering the transactions.

Several small-time buyers are dealing with the farmers produce but hardly any wholesalers are buying the vegetables due to various reasons in the available four hours timings in the morning, regretted farmer Anil Patil. The farmers are a worried lot as a large quantity of vegetables remains unsold in the APMC market. According to farmers, the prices of most of their vegetables have drastically fallen due to the falling demand for them. Vegetables like ladies finger, cauliflower, capsicum, potato, tomato, beans, carrot, cucumber, etc., are being produced in large quantities in several parts of Belagavi.

Farmer Shivangouda Patil said, the lockdown has put the lives of farmers in a crisis as they are unable to effectively market their produce for the past one year. "We all suffered a lot due to the lockdown last year that prevented farmers from doing a good business. The situation has repeated in the Covid second wave now," he added.

'Doctors first want to jab those waiting for 2nd dose'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

THE CM tweeted, "Flagged off the 4th phase of Covid-19 vaccination drive to inoculate all citizens between 18-44 years of age. Our govt is committed to vaccinating every citizen at the earliest and preparations are under way for the smooth & orderly rollout of vaccines to all. Vaccine is by far the biggest weapon in our battle against Covid-19. Govt is leaving no stone unturned to ensure availability of sufficient stock of vaccine in the state and has already initiated the process of procuring 2 Crores doses over and above Centre's allocation (sic)."

As per Saturday's Health Department bulletin, in the entire state, only Bengaluru Urban district started the vaccination drive and about 35 beneficiaries were vaccinated. Four branches of Apollo Hospitals in the state - Jayanagar, Bannerghatta Road, Seshadripuram and in Mysuru also started the vaccination at a cost of Rs 850 per dose of Covishield.

Shobana Kamineni, Executive Vice-Chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Group, said, "The second wave of infections has seen younger patients getting affected and vaccinating everyone above the age of 18 will help in stopping the relentless rise in Covid-19 cases and take us closer to a Covid-free future."

Meanwhile, the BBMP carried out free vaccination at the JD Institute of Fashion Technology. "The BBMP set up a camp at our college and we are happy to get vaccinated. We are seeing a crisis and it is terrifying that people losing their lives every day. People should not hesitate and should come forward to get vaccinated," said 26-year-old Nivedita Vidyanand, Programme Coordinator, PG Diploma in Fashion Communication.

However, for others who are hoping to get vaccinated it is very unlikely it will happen any time soon. "I called up the PHC where I had booked a slot, but the doctor politely explained that it is not possible. I was told to come in June as there is a shortage of vaccines and the doctors first want to vaccinate all those who are waiting for their second dose," said a 20-year-old woman.

Minister Eatala found guilty of grabbing ryots' lands in Medak dist

MEDAK: Former Health Minister of Telangana Eatala Rajender has been found guilty of grabbing lands belonging to farmers and undertaking illegal constructions on them, confirmed Medak District Collector A Harish on Saturday. Several farmers came forward and lodged complaints with the Collector and the Vigilance DG Purnachandra Rao in this regard. The DG visited the Atchampet village along with ACB officials and interacted with the land owners who had allegedly lost their lands. Collector Harish said that a preliminary inquiry by the officials concerned had revealed that about 65 acres of land was owned by Jamuna Hatcheries pvt ltd, a firm owned by Rajender's wife. Harish said that three teams comprising 15 surveyors and eight tahsildars were formed to ascertain the total amount of land that had been seized. He said some construction had also been done on the land. The Collector said a report on the inquiry would be submitted to the government in the next few hours.

> 65 acres of land was owned by Jamuna Hatcheries pvt ltd
>
> Collector Harish

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No.F.1(35)/Ph.D/ACA/2021-22 Dated:1-5-2021

NOTIFICATION
Applications for Ph.D. (Ayurveda) Programmes for Academic Session 2021-22

Applications are invited in the prescribed format for Ph.D. Programmes for below mentioned Categories:

A. For Written Entrance Examination for admission in Ph.D. Programmes in 14 Specialities for the Academic Session 2021-22.
B. For interview of UGC-NET/JRF/SLET/AYUSH-NET/CSIR-NET qualified candidates.

The Brochure containing details of Entrance Test along with Application Form is available in Institute Website **www.nia.nic.in.** Eligible candidates can download the Application Form and submit completely filled Application Form with supporting documents and prescribed fees to National Institute of Ayurveda. Last dates for receiving applications applying for category A is 31/05/2021, 5:00 PM and for category B is 15/05/2021 till 5:00 PM by post or in person. Applications received after the last date will not be entertained.

REGISTRAR

CAUVERY NEERAVARI NIGAMA LIMITED
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Office of the Executive Engineer, No.1 H.R.B.H.L.C Division, Gorur Hassan District-573120

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION Tender Notification No. 2/2021-22 Dated: 27.04.2021 CALL-2 Time Extension (Two covers under Package System)

Tender invited in this office vide Notification No.2/2021-22/ CALL-2 Dated-27.04.2021. the last date for the receipt of tenders has been extended from 12.05.2021 to 15.05.2021 up to 16th hour. Cover-I (Technical Bid) will opened in the office of the Executive Engineer, No.1 HRBHLC Division, Gorur on 17.05.2021, Cover-II (Financial Bid) of qualificed bidders will be opened in the office of the Executive Engineer, No 1, HRBHLC Division, Gorur after approval of Technical bid.other conditions remain unaltered.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, CNNL, No.1
HRBHLC Division, Gorur

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The Chief/Superintending Engineer, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mysore invites For & on behalf of the President of India, Sealed item rate tenders from experienced Contractors with sound financial & technical capacity for the following work(s):

Tender Reference No.	**BARC/MYS/PO&M/JJ/COMP/PP/2021/**
Name of work	Machining of Diaphragm compressor piston ring & piston housing.
Estimated Cost	**Rs.68,000/-** (Rupees Sixty Eight Thousand Only)
Period of Completion	**03 Months**
Earnest Money Deposit	NIL, Bid Security declaration may please be provided as per format enclosed in a separate cover
Security Deposit	2.5% of tendered value
Performance Guarantee	3.0% of tendered value
Cost of Tender Document	**₹150/-** (Rupees One hundred and Fifty only) Non-Refundable
Tender Sale Period	From **03-05-2021** upto **12-05-2021, 16.00**
Due date & time for submission of Tender	**13-05-2021** Upto **15.00 hrs.**
Date & time of opening of Tender	**13-05-2021** on **15.05 hrs.**
Place of Tender Submission	In Box No: 3 at Building No: 2 in BARC, Mysore
Place of Tender opening	Building No: 2 in BARC, Mysore
Contact Nos.	**Head of Division/EIC** : 0821 – 240 6630 **Office** : 0821 – 240 6530

Tender documents will be issued only in person on written request and not by post or Courier.

Sd/-
Chief Engineer
For & on behalf of the President of India

Life is more beautiful knowing that we've taken a loan on death. Even light is treasured more when there is darkness — Kim Namjoon

THE SECOND WAVE AND THE SATIRE OF POSITIVITY

OPINION

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WE keep hearing and saying, "Let us be positive." Let's say we are tired of it.

After being ravaged for centuries and across epochs by all kinds of contagion, we must have thought that we had learnt our lesson well from history. But all those stern reminders come to naught during the corona pandemic though we are in the 21st century, an era of unprecedented technological, scientific and narcissistic progress. Humans have never been bigger, faster, healthier and smarter. Humans are essentially everywhere now. They are deeper into the oceans and higher up in the sky. They are looking for newer places to infest and populate after they have wrung this planet dry for what it's worth. This is the essence of being human. We are the most opportunistic vermin to have existed in the known history of the world, only more nefarious and aesthetically appealing than one can imagine.

This pandemic has opened a can of beans when it comes to human behaviour and spilled it over right on our faces. It has revealed our true colours, unfortunately; the skeletons keep tumbling out of the closet and it's not pretty. Beneath the flimsy veil of compassion and the human spirit, the true underlying decrepit and dying soul lays unmasked. It is atrociously dark and deeply saddening for those who still have a scrap of conscience tethered into their minds. Conscience, my friend, if you mistakenly have one, needs to be discarded! But for others, it's time to make hay while the sun shines.

In the already overburdened population that was teetering along with poor and inadequate infrastructure, this pandemic may just land the felling blow. Too many infected, too many dead, too many dying and too few beds, too less doctors, nurses, medicines and oxygen. We had one year from the first wave of corona to ramp up our healthcare facilities and had the examples of other developed countries gripped with second and third waves to learn from. Yet we failed to take note of it all and fell prey to the illusion of being immunologically superior. This, we ironically infer, is due to the deplorable and unhygienic living conditions we are forced to live in. Such an impossible yet collective short-sightedness may lead to an unheard of catastrophe.

But wait: It's not all dark and murky as it seems for everyone. There are individuals who are profiteering in this winner-takes-all business. Life can indeed be a zero-sum game sometimes. X's demise is surely another Y's opportunity. Let us refrain from moving into the controversial area of who X and Y are! Back to basics: Not everyone is losing everything. Some are gaining propitiously. For every person getting a hospital bed anywhere, there might be a middleman earning a big chunk of money from the hospital expenses incurred by the unfortunate and ignorant patient and his relative. Simply put, it really costs to be ignorant nowadays. For every physician who dies or suffers in the line of fire, there's a self-proclaimed quack, especially one with his own hospital setup, who might be making a killing (pun intended) out of it. For every daily wage earner who earns nothing due to the restrictions underway, there are people who are stockpiling and black-marketing important anti-viral and other life-saving medications, building up a fortune. For every corpse carried out from the morgue, there might be a staffer or a middleman again getting their purses bigger in lieu of avoiding a post mortem of the body. For every poor man in a shrivelling economy, there are those who are turning billionaires at a freakish frequency, not all of them benefitting from the pandemic. Every time the government tries its best to curb the situation, we, the masses, fail to follow the rules and then blame it on the administration. The last year has been filled with self-obsessed, self-patronised, overwhelmingly irritating know-it-alls, i.e. glamorous individuals who know Covid-19 inside out, much more than the virus itself. The pandemic has given innovations to many, news ideas of debauchery, fraud and extortion that are far more concerning and probably long-lasting than Covid itself. Can't thank the virus enough to strip humanity off people, exposing the basic tenets.

So, for a generation of people who are fixated with the Epicurean abbreviation YOLO (You Only Live Once), this might bring a sense of absolute freedom and rashness or serve as a terse reminder if taken in a literal sense. This is the lifetime to 'go big or go home'. This is the time indeed to move up the food chain, in a world where big fish eat (sorry, read it as devour) small ones. Free time, screen time, easy riches and luxury are any time better bets than burning pyres, wailing voices, dusted families and social chaos. These times, if not anything, are a lugubrious expose on the scavenging and parasitic mindset of our base nature. Maybe humankind has evolved from the shadows, or maybe we are our shadows. There's no true way to tell—especially in such troubled times.

It's never too late. Can't we again join hands for a collective humanity? Can't we learn from our mistakes? Millions of identities and names are turning into numbers each day. So, while there's still time, at least for once, let us look into the mirror.

(Views expressed are personal and solely belong to the authors)

DESPERATE PEOPLE TELL LEADERS: GO

POINT OF VIEW

T J S GEORGE

THE Telegraph said what others hesitated to state openly. "It's best to state this simply," said the Kolkata daily. "Narendra Modi needs to go. Amit Shah needs to go. Ajay Mohan Bisht, aka Yogi Adityanath, needs to go." This view is not new. What is new is that it is being publicly aired. The public mood in India has changed. Tired of the pretensions, and the proprietorial arrogance of the Government, people have found the courage to come out and openly attack Narendra Modi and his self-centred approach to administration.

Modi of course is the greatest exhibitionist India has seen. His histrionics have tried to give the impression that Indian history began with his rise to power. His public relations programme was a bit too obvious to make any impact. Remember the picture of him reading books with an obedient peacock standing nearby? On the day India set a world record for the largest number of corona cases in a 24-hour period, his radio programme Mann Ki Baat talked mostly about toys and childhood. It's no wonder that a rudderless-nation hears calls for Modi-Shah-Bisht to go.

As India's most image-conscious prime minister, Modi must be particularly upset about the way the world has revised its estimates of him. The US think tank, Freedom House, has reported that "democracy is on a dangerous decline in India." Other India-watchers have spoken about the rise of authoritarianism and "illiberalism" under Modi.

Writer Pankaj Mishra put it bluntly when he wrote that India's Covid tragedy was avoidable and is largely the fault of a boastful, incompetent government. Typical of newspaper comments on India was the *London Times*' statement: "Modi flounders in India's gigantic [Corona] second wave." The chief of the World Health Organization cited India as "a devastating reminder" of the damage Covid could wreak.

But does Modi really care any longer about how the world looks at him? It is unlikely because he does not even care about conditions in the country getting worse and thereby exposing his incompetence. GDP growth at 4.5% is the lowest in the last five years. Production of industrial goods has been flat for quite some time. Unemployment at 8.5% in October 2020 was an all-time high. But who can forget Modi claiming that his Goods and Services Tax solved all problems. That was reminiscent of his infamous demonetisation, a "colossal policy failure" as some economists described it.

Response to the current crisis has also been a colossal policy failure. The main plank of the response was to kickstart new programmes for the construction of three secretariat buildings in the pet Modi scheme called Central Vista Project (total estimated cost ₹20,000 crore). No minister heard people asking: How many hospitals, oxygen plants and vaccine manufacturing units could have been built with the money spent on the World's Tallest Statue, World's Largest Stadium, World's Grandest Central Vista? But

Response to the current crisis has been a colossal policy failure. The main plank was to kickstart new programmes for the construction of three secretariat buildings in the Central Vista Project. No minister heard people asking: How many hospitals, oxygen plants and vaccine manufacturing units could have been built with this money?

oxygen plants cannot boost the ego as profoundly as the Tallest and the Largest can. It is small men who do things in the hope that their smallness will be seen as bigness.

People have been hitting back, bringing Modi's bloated ego several notches down. A retired professor in Punjab demanded the removal of Modi's photo from Covid vaccination certificates. In the south, these certificates did not carry Modi pictures. Obviously the Big Man knew that South India was not Punjab. The Government's mishandling of the crisis was noted worldwide. "A lethal, fast-paced second wave has brought India's health care systems to the verge of collapse," said the director of the Centre for Disease Dynamics in Washington (who happens to be a man of Indian origin). He went on to say: "India's rapid slide into this unprecedented crisis is a direct result of complacency and lack of preparation by the Government." Saying that India is now a living hell, *The Guardian* said Modi "should make amends for mistakes that have caused enormous suffering." The Australian newspaper said: "Arrogance, hypernationalism and bureaucratic incompetence have combined to create a crisis of epic proportions." Radio France was more downright. It said: "Health has collapsed in India. The main culprit is Narendra Modi."

Modi had the thick skin to claim that India was doing better than others in fighting Covid. Actually India was lagging behind as a direct result of official negligence. In 2020, India was the third highest in the world on Covid count and the lowest in testing. In Delhi, a woman went from place to place looking for oxygen for her brother. No one helped and he died. The women cried out helplessly, before cameras: "Modi. Delhi Government. Who will reply? This Modi. For what did he take my vote? Why is he destroying the country?"

FIX ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CORONA CATASTROPHE

POWER & POLITICS

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IN this political ecosystem where acronyms pass for action, VIP has a new interpretation. Verily Insurmountable Pandemic. Most VIPs who perch on the pinnacle of power in politics and bureaucracy have realised that corona has come home. Many ministers and their kin died. Top arbiters of national destiny fell to the divine arbiter. VIPs are now facing the unusual experience of not finding ICU beds in spite of pulling levers. Despite warnings by scientists, doctors and pandemic experts, this smugness cost them lives. Death thrust a skeletal finger into the highest political ozone layers with the chilly message—no one is safe from my touch. The murderous mayhem unleashed by the coronavirus has exposed the hollowness of power. Even after 15 months, none of the geniuses with gargantuan resources are able to outwit the virus. It is haunting all pin codes, vanishing here and appearing there. It spares none; prince or pauper, power player or poor player. Covid-19 has proved to be the great leveler.

The second coming has taken by surprise the establishment, which inoculated itself with vanity and recklessness. India gets around 4,00,000 new cases daily. Over a dozen chief ministers, an almost equal number of Union ministers, Governors, Lt Governors and legislators fell into the virus's lethal embrace. Several Supreme Court and High Court judges were quarantined or hospitalised. Over 200 IAS, IPS and members of other elite services fell critically ill—Bihar's chief secretary died. Around 1,000 doctors and nurses became martyrs, battling for the lives of others. Sadhus and soothsayers lost their near and dear ones. There is hardly a famous and influential family that hasn't been mauled by the virus.

True, India is not the only country to have suffered a massive spike in casualties and caseloads. But it is the only nation that believed its initial success was the final victory over the pandemic. While other countries planned for the future and boosted existing health infrastructure, India went into celebratory mode by conducting elections and religious congregations with utter disregard for corona protocol. Political leaders engaged with massive audiences without masks, defying the very social distancing norms they are meant to uphold. Instead of leading by example, the exam was leading them—India failed in the test of testing, as governments fudged data, cracked down on dissenting voices and instituted criminal action against the aggrieved. Law enforcement agencies were lax in enforcing the law. In short, it was pandemic 'pawry' time with TV pundits talking the walk without a clue to the right direction, and only obeying instructions. Predictably, karma does not forgive. No one is willing to take the responsibility for India's monumental failure to protect lives. Finger pointing is the only point being made to protect reputations instead of lives. Who will answer these questions?

*Who advised the states and the Centre to dismantle the additional Covid facilities created during the first wave? The prime minister announced a draconian lockdown without reasonable notice. In this period, thousands of Covid beds were added to hospitals. Fresh premises like schools, hotels and government buildings were converted into treatment centres. Special concessions were given to manufacture PPE kits and ventilators. Though the nation was ill-equipped to handle such a large scale calamity, Indians fought it together and came out stronger. Temporarily though. Why weren't the additional healthcare facilities built during the first crises retained and expanded?

*Why could a selected and trusted group of eminent doctors, scientists and babus not assess the shortage of essential medical equipment, medicines, hospital beds and oxygen in spite of warnings by the medical and scientific establishment? They were sleeping at the wheel. Didn't they know the geographical difficulties in moving oxygen and medicines from one state to another? Did they study the logistical nightmare it would pose in future? For example, why didn't they flag that oxygen for Delhi would be sourced from Odisha and not Haryana?

*Who is responsible for the shortage of doctors and hospitals? A country of

1.4 billion people has just 550 medical colleges with little less than 1,00,000 MBBS seats. According to a research study, India has around 70,000 private and public hospitals with 1.9 million beds. But only 95,000 ICU beds and 50,000 ventilators were available. Delhi had only 1,000 ventilators while UP, with an over 20 crore population, had 7,000 ventilators. Who should be held accountable for creating the artificial shortage of life-saving medical equipment?

*Who in the government is responsible for ensuring that all hospitals must be equipped to supply uninterrupted oxygen to patients? Why was it not made mandatory for them to install oxygen plants on their premises? Why weren't

India is not the only country to have suffered a massive spike. But it is the only nation that believed its initial success was the final victory over the pandemic

oxygen concentrators imported earlier? Why were the sanctioned plants not made operational? Why was no audit done on hospital infrastructure in the past year to minimise the current agony?

*Why were governments not advised by their experts to ramp up vaccine capacity in advance? And when they did, why was the advice ignored? India is the world's oxygen factory. Vaccine billionaires were after money and image, and climbing on the 'maitri' bandwagon for profit, not principle. Hence India hasn't been able to supply the necessary amounts of vaccines to Indians, although almost every other country had placed huge orders in advance. But our group of Error Experts failed to assess the national need and time frame for vaccine production and availability of related medicines. Atmanirbhar became ironic when the same India that donated over 100 million doses to other countries was desperately dependent on others for more. Rulers began to place additional orders only after the second wave had devastated millions of more lives.

*Why didn't highly reputed, handsomely profitable enterprises like the Tatas, Mahindras and the Ambanis come forward earlier to supplement the government's efforts? Why couldn't Mahindras, who boast of making bullet-proof vehicles for the netas and others, provide fully equipped ambulances to government hospitals? And why did Adar Poonawalla assume the title of a philanthropist by reducing the price of the Covishield vaccine?

The current crises could have been averted if each member of the sectoral leadership had taken their guardianship seriously. The corporate sector, which could have focused on creating better health infrastructure for its employees, was busy escalating its valuations and junking human values in the shredder of greed. Hardly any big company gave liberal medical support to its employees. The bureaucracy could not foresee the collapse of India's weak and inefficient infrastructure. Now they are paying the price collectively. The rich are getting a taste of how the poor suffer during a calamity—if the poor and underprivileged cannot find an ICU bed; neither can they, despite money and might. Unfortunately, accountability has lost its relevance and reliability. In the current model of governance, officials in sensitive positions are chosen by the leadership after passing three tests-loyalty, desirability and capability. It seems that after passing the first test, most key advisors in the establishment have failed to perform and betrayed the people who chose them as protectors. Instead of becoming solution leaders, they are just cheerleaders. Living in the unholy utopia of selfishness and self-gratification, they have realised too late that death has stormed the citadel. They are trapped in the bewilderment of ignorance, apathy and self interest. Sure, some may score brownie points by winning an election or promote the 'positive side' of over two lakh deaths, but the truth is that mortality is the nemesis of hubris. Salvation is not the MasterCard of the privileged. And invincibility is just a myth.

QUOTE CORNER

We are seeing virus mutations happening and for as long as many parts of the world remain unvaccinated, you are going to see many more of these mutations and that is a big concern for the global economy

Gita Gopinath, IMF Chief Economist

A me-first approach for vaccination might serve short-term political interests, but it is self-defeating and will lead to a protracted recovery, with trade and travel continuing to suffer

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General

MAILBAG

WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

Candid write-up

This is with reference to *If only we had not bought propaganda ...* (May 1). I appreciate the Editor's honest and candid write-up. I hope God helps us and that the regime in which we really placed a lot of trust realises its mistakes. Having said that, we would have been in a mess of equal scale, if not worse, had the Congress been in power.

R Gopal, email

Centre-made disasters

I have been waiting for this article for the past year. It touches upon almost all the Centre's disastrous moves. This is the only reason I have been subscribing to this newspaper for long. Impartial and sincere, like Mr Goenka.

Shaji Berly E, email

The importance of proportion

I read the Editor's opinion about the collective failure of many institutions and spaces with respect to the pandemic. Clearly, he is thoughtful as well as correct in pointing to the failure of the media in particular. I think the media does not cover important issues in proportion to their prevalence in society. In most publications, one can find articles about poverty, sustainability, development and inequality. But these are too few.

Ashwin Mahesh, email

Moved by the column

The article is one of the finest I have read in a long time. I was moved by the piece, especially the last paragraph. It's a fact that the second wave has affected all of us in some way or the other; we have lost friends, relatives, colleagues and neighbours. If only the government had concentrated on saving lives instead of trying to grab power in states, things would have been slightly different.

C Vijay Kumar, Bengaluru

Comparison with the West

The issues brought out in the article are undoubtedly factual. But the analysis is biased. The author should have compared our pandemic situation with that of the West and analysed how despite all the so-called high-quality healthcare systems and 'sensitive governance', the US lost about 6 lakh lives and Europe even more. But the inclusion of these would have diluted the rhetoric.

Manoj Kumar Sinha, Visakhapatnam

Partisan piece

The article overlooked the warnings that the Centre gave stating that the pandemic was not over and we should not let our guard down. It was the media that criticised the government for last year's lockdown and egged on the farmers' protests after the first wave of the pandemic. While it criticises UP, it is silent on the Delhi government's failure, which neither built hospitals nor installed oxygen plants.

S Vasudevan, Chennai

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

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TWEETS OF THE DAY

Mahua Moitra @MahuaMoitra
This govt enforced revocation of Art 370 overnight & is ensuring Central Vista finished on time, but can't supply 900MT oxygen daily to Delhi?

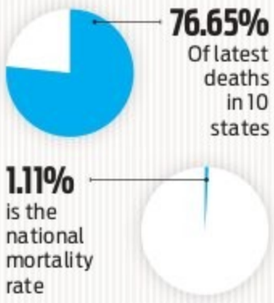
Shashi Tharoor @ShashiTharoor
British rulers went hunting while Indians were dying in famines. The BJP rulers went hunting (for votes) while Indians were dying from #Covid

Subramanian Swamy @Swamy39
I did not enter politics because I had nothing else to do unlike most others. I entered for making India a strong democracy and nationalist

NATIONAL ISSUES

3,523
Fatalities in **last 24 hours** (Maharashtra 828, Delhi 375, Uttar Pradesh 332, Chhattisgarh 269, Karnataka 217, Gujarat 173, Rajasthan 155, Uttarakhand 122, Jharkhand 120, Punjab & Tamil Nadu 113 each)

2,11,853
Total deaths in India



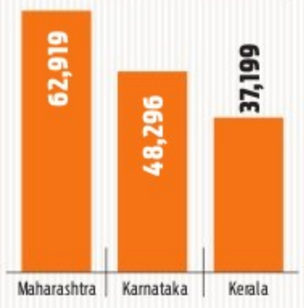
76.65% Of latest deaths in 10 states

1.11% is the national mortality rate

4,01,003
New cases in last 24 hours

Of new cases in 10 states — Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar

MOST NEW CASES



Sharp rise in U'khand toll

Dehradun: With just 0.8 per cent population of India, Uttarakhand accounted for 2.73% of deaths across the country in the last seven days. In the last week of April, a total of 22,121 deaths were recorded in India, out of which, 603 were from Uttarakhand.

Maha sets up control room

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government has decided to set up a separate control room to be manned by senior and retired doctors who will take a call on when to shift the patients in home isolation to hospitals so that their lives can be saved in time.

Rlys deploy 4K Covid coaches

New Delhi: The Railways has deployed 4,000 isolation coaches with around 64,000 beds across the country. As many as 191 coaches have been handed over for Covid care with a bed capacity of 2,990 beds. Isolation coaches have been utilised in Delhi, Maharashtra and MP.

₹8.8K cr disaster response fund released

MHA says aid released in advance to tackle the Covid surge; most affected 10 states to receive major chunk

People queue up for Covid-19 jabs at a vaccination centre in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, on Saturday | PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Centre has released the first instalment, ₹8,873.6 crore, of State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) in advance to the states in view of the continuing Covid-19 surge.

Half of the amount, i.e. ₹4,436 crore can be used for Covid-19 containment measures, including setting up of hospitals and oxygen generation units. The Union home ministry said as a special dispensation, the Department of Expenditure, under the Ministry of Finance, has released the amount in advance of the normal schedule at its recommendation.

An amount of ₹8,873.6 crore has been released to the states, an official statement said.

Normally, the first instalment of the SDRF is released in June according to the recommendations of the Finance Commission, the ministry said, in a statement.

However, in relaxation of the normal procedure, not only has the release of the SDRF been advanced but the amount has also been released without waiting for the utilisation certificate of the amount provided to the states in the last financial year.

Of the total amount released by the Centre, the worst affected states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala will get ₹1,288.80 crore, ₹728 crore, 773.20 crore, 529.60 crore, 316.40 crore and ₹125.60 crore respectively. Of the total amount, following sums would be released to Haryana (₹196.40 crore), Himachal Pradesh (₹163.60 crore), Jharkhand (₹227.20 crore), Odisha (₹641.60 crore), Punjab (₹198 crore), Rajasthan (₹592.40 crore), Telangana (₹179. 60), Tamil Nadu (₹408 crore), Uttarakhand (₹374.80 crore) and West Bengal (₹404.40 crore).

The funds from the SDRF may be used by the states for meeting the cost of oxygen generation and storage plants in hospitals, ventilators, air purifiers, strengthening ambulance services, Covid-19 hospitals, Covid care centres, etc.

Nitrogen plants to turn into oxygen generators

Consultation gains pace

Consultation has been held with potential industrial units. About 30 industries have been identified and efforts are on to modify nitrogen plants for oxygen production

The funds from the SDRF may be used by the states for various measures related to the containment of Covid-19, including meeting the cost of oxygen generation and storage plants in hospitals

Union Home Ministry

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

TO further augment the availability of medical oxygen in the country, the Centre is identifying the industries having spare nitrogen plants and exploring the feasibility of converting them to produce oxygen.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) with the help of State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) has identified such potential industries, wherein existing nitrogen generation plants may be used for production of oxygen.

Consultation has been held with potential industrial units and experts. About 30 industries have been identified and efforts are on to modify nitrogen plants for the production of medical oxygen.

Some of these plants can be shifted to nearby hospitals for supplying oxygen while some others, where it is not feasible to shift the plants, can produce oxygen on-site. In one such instance M/s UPL Ltd has converted a nitrogen plant to produce oxygen at L G Rotary Hospital, Vapi (Gujarat).

By replacing the Carbon Molecular Sieve (CMS) in the nitrogen plants with Zeolite Molecular Sieve (ZMS) and making a few other changes such as installation of oxygen analyser and change in control panel system and flow valves, the oxygen for medical use can be produced. With the availability of ZMS, such a modified plant can be set-up in 4-5 days while installation of new oxygen plant may take minimum 3-4weeks. Oxygen produced in on-site plants has to be compressed and filled in cylinders using high pressure.

PRIORITY

SII CEO hints at 'aggressive pressure' to meet jab needs

NEW DELHI: Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla on Saturday spoke out about the pressures he was under over the production of Covid-19 vaccines to meet the ever-increasing demand in India as the country battles through a devastating second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

In his first comments since he was provided with 'Y' category security by the Indian government, Poonawalla told a British newspaper about receiving aggressive calls from some of the most powerful people in India, demanding supplies of Covishield vaccine.

That pressure is largely behind his decision to fly into London to be with his wife and children, the 40-year-old entrepreneur said. "I'm staying here (London) for an extended time because I don't want to go back to that situation. Everything falls on my shoulders but I can't do it alone... I don't want to be in a situation where you are just trying to do your job, and just because you can't supply the needs of X, Y or Z you really don't want to guess what they are going to do," he said.

"Everyone feels they should get the vaccine. They can't understand why anyone else should get it before them," Poonawalla said. *PTI*

Centre gave most O_2 & Remdesivir to Maharashtra. It should be given not at where there are strong leaders, but in those places with most patients

Devendra Fadnavis, BJP

Over 700 teachers who were forced to attend duty for panchayat polls have died in UP. What is happening is nothing less than a crime against humanity

Priyanka Gandhi, Congress

Modi govt must DELIVER NOW· Provide oxygen, free universal vaccination, direct cash transfer, free food grains & control drug prices

Sitaram Yechury, CPI(M)

1,91,64,969
TOTAL INFECTION TALLY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Modi ignored warnings about second wave: Rahul

NEW DELHI: As India logged a world record of over four lakh coronavirus infections on Saturday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the entire world is shaken by what is happening here and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "dropping the ball and throwing it to states" after prematurely taking credit for having "won against Covid-19" when the second wave was already underway.

"Rely on yourself is the motto. No one will come to help you. Definitely, not the prime minister," Gandhi said, while alleging that the Covid-19 situation has gone completely out of control for the Modi government, and wondered whether it was their way of making the states and the citizens truly 'Aatmanirbhar'.

Training his guns on the prime minister and Home Minister Amit Shah, Gandhi said India must be the only country in the world facing this massive pandemic without the guidance of an expert and empowered group that is charged with fighting the virus and protecting the people.

"They continuously ignored rising cases and were busy instead with election campaigns. They encouraged super-spreader events. They even bragged about them. Our PM and Home Minister were not even wearing masks in public over the past few months. What sort of a message is that sending to citizens?" Gandhi said.

Gandhi, who was among the first to cancel his rallies and had also urged other political leaders to do so, noted that the second Covid-19 wave is a tsunami that has brought absolute devastation and has destroyed everything in its way.

The former Congress chief termed the story of vaccine pricing as one of "discount sales" and a "complete eyewash" alleging that the vaccine makers first marked up the prices and then reduced that while making a show of the entire exercise. *PTI*

Needs national strategy, says Sonia

New Delhi: Congress president Sonia Gandhi Saturday sought political consensus on a national strategy to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and that it was time the central and state governments woke up to fulfil their responsibilities. "Congress will support every step taken by the Centre to save the country from the pandemic," she said, reiterating her demand for free Covid-19 vaccines for all and asked the Centre to put `6,000 in the bank accounts of the poor families. "Testing should be increased across the country and oxygen and other resources should be arranged on a war footing," she said.

More kids below 10 yrs get infected

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

THE Maharashtra government's health department data has revealed that more and more children are getting infected with the Covid virus in the second wave. There is a 51 per cent rise in infection among children within a period of a month in the state.

As many as 1,34,470 children as young as 10 years have been infected against 88,827 on April 3. More than 75,387 children were infected within 25 days in the state, which is almost a 51 per cent rise in positive cases among children.

According to the health department data, 3.04 per cent of children up to 10 years old were infected while the percentage was 6.80 among those between the 11-20 age group.

The percentage of infection among the 21-30 age category was 17.51. The highest infection was in the age group of 31-40 years — 22.09 per cent.

In the senior citizen group between 61 and above, the positivity percentage was found at 17.15 per cent.

The data also reveals that after children, the young population between the 21-60 age group are more infected — around 72.6 per cent in Maharashtra.

More men are getting the virus than women with percentages at 60 and 40 respectively.

The total number of deaths in Maharashtra is 67,214 against 2.048 lakh in India. Maharashtra's mortality rate is 1.50 per cent against the country's 1.11 per cent.

Across the country, Maharashtra stands fourth in mortality among Covid positive patients. The Punjab mortality rate is the highest i.e. 2.45 per cent, followed by 1.89 per cent in Sikkim, and 1.51 per cent in Himachal Pradesh.

Doesn't spare youth in state

According to the health department data, 3.04% of children up to 10 years old were infected while the percentage was 6.80 among those between the 11-20 age group.

SILENT FLOW

A deserted ghat of Ganga during a lockdown to curb the surge in Covid-19, in Varanasi on Saturday | PTI

Navy deploys 7 ships to bring oxygen tanks from abroad

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

IN support of the country's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and as part of operation 'Samudra Setu II', the Indian Navy on Saturday deployed seven ships — INS Kolkata, Kochi, Talwar, Tabar, Trikand, Jalashwa and Airavat — for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries.

INS Kolkata and INS Talwar, which were on Persian Gulf deployment, were the first to immediately diverted for the task and entered the port of Manama, Bahrain on April 30.

Commander Vivek Madhwal said the Navy has kept enough room to add to the operations as per future needs. "The Indian Navy also has the surge capability, to deploy more ships when the need arises," he said.

As for the details of the task, INS Talwar, with 40 MT LMO embarked, is headed back home. INS Kolkata has proceeded to Doha, Qatar for embarking on medical supplies and will subsequently head to Kuwait for embarking on liquid oxygen tanks.

This crematorium caretaker skips grandson's wedding as bodies pile up

VINEET UPADHYAY @ Dehradun

FOR months, Brigrashan, the caretaker of Rajpura crematorium in Haldwani, had been preparing for his grandson's wedding on April 25. But just a few days before the ceremony, he decided to skip it after seeing the steady stream of bodies being brought to the only crematorium in the Uttarakhand city allocated for the Covid-19 victims.

The 79-year old caretaker, as known as 'Munshi ji' among the people in the area, says the crematorium has never seen such a large number of funerals at a time.

"On a normal day, three-four bodies would arrive here for the last rites. But now, as many as 30-32 bodies are cremated at this place. I have never seen such as fearful sight in my life," says Brigrashan, who has been managing the crematorium for more than 27 years now.

Bhrigrashan has been working for over 18 hours a day for the last two weeks.

Despite managing almost everything — from arranging wood to registering the details of the deceased to maintaining their records for further reference, he concedes that the most difficult part is to console those who lost their children to the pandemic.

His seniors in the trust, which maintains the crematorium, had even sanctioned his leaves for his grandson's wedding, but he decided to stay here and serve people.

"I miss my family a lot, and I always wanted to attend the wedding. But then, this work is more important. My children and grandchildren also encouraged to help people in these trying times," he says.

Rambabu Jaiswal, an official at the trust, says: "We were aware of his grandson's wedding for which he asked for leaves. Despite the leave sanction, he requested us to cancel them."

Uttarakhand has reported 2,731 deaths since the first case was registered in March last year. This April has been worst with 80,110 new cases and 907 deaths, the highest so far.

On a normal day, three-four bodies would arrive here for the last rites. But now, as many as 30-32 bodies are cremated at this place. I have never seen such as fearful sight in my life —Brigrashan

92-YEAR-OLD BEATS COVID

A 92-year-old woman from Rajasthan's Kota won the battle against Covid-19 in just 12 days, with doctors saying her positive attitude and regular lung exercises helped in the speedy recovery.

108 VOTE COUNTING CENTRES IN WEST BENGAL

	Max	Min		Max	Min
Ahmedabad	41	27	Mumbai	34	28
Bhopal	36	23	Panaji	33	27
Jaipur	34	27	Patna	37	24
Amritsar	39	23	Lucknow	38	27
Chennai	32	27	Port Blair	30	27
Kolkata	35	28	Imphal	29	17
Srinagar	26	12	Chandigarh	38	24

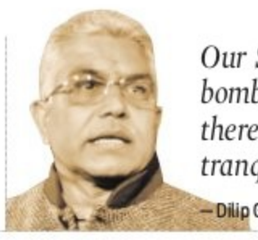
ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2021 DECIDE

Tomorrow is Satyajit Ray's birthday, and also, Election Results day. Bengal hopes 'Satya' gets its 'Jeet' and the verdict (Raay) will reflect it

— Jawhar Sircar, former Prasar Bharati executive

Teachers' unions in UP have submitted a list of 577 teachers who died on poll duty. But, the poll panel will continue to march on

— Priyanka Chaturvedi, Rajya Sabha MP



Our Sonar Bangla will have no bombs, no gun-making hubs and there will be no militants. Peace and tranquillity will prevail

— Dilip Ghosh, West Bengal BJP president

TMC & BJP in silent mode ahead of election verdict

Counting to begin at 8 am; which way the electoral winds are blowing will be clear later on; expect delay in announcement of final results

A counting centre at Netaji Indoor Stadium in Kolkata on Sunday | BIBHASH LODH

PRANAB MONDAL @Kolkata

HOURS before the verdict of West Bengal's electorates in the high-octane Assembly elections, two major stakeholders, the ruling Trinamool Congress, and its arch-rival BJP, preferred to be in silent mode and seemed to be busy reading the body language of each other.

After a month-long fierce electoral battle, both the TMC and the saffron camp claimed on Saturday that they would secure a majority in two-thirds of Bengal's 294 Assembly constituencies.

The counting will begin at 8 am. However, the trends are likely to emerge much later in view of the Covid situation. The number of polling booths was increased to more than 1 lakh from 78,000 in the wake of the pandemic, which is likely to cause a delay in the announcement of the final results.

BJP's spokesperson Shamik Bhattacharya claimed on Saturday that the party would secure victory in more than 200 seats, which was the target set by the party's national leadership much ahead of the elections. TMC MP and spokesperson Saugata Roy, too, claimed his party would bag victory in 200 constituencies.

All set for vote counting

Kolkata: When counting begins on 8 am in Sunday, there will be 292 observers and 256 companies of central forces deployed at the counting centres across 23 districts, the Election Commission said.

The Left Front-Congress-Indian Secular Force (ISF) alliance, however, claimed their candidates would give surprise to BJP and TMC in many constituencies.

The TMC fielded candidates in 291 constituencies allowing Gorkha Janmukti Morcha to contest in three seats in the Hills.

The BJP fielded candidates in 293 constituencies. Under the alliance, Left Front fielded candidates in 165 seats, Congress in 92 and ISF in 37 seats. In 2016, TMC had a stunning victory, winning 211 seats and bettering its 2011 tally of 184 seats. Congress won 44 seats and the Left Front won 33 seats fighting within an alliance. Exit poll results for West Bengal projected a cliff-hanger.

BJP mandal prez arrested

BJP's mandal president in Malda, Nimai Mondal, was arrested on Saturday over the firing at the party's candidate in Malda constituency, Gopal Soha, on April 19. Saha survived and the doctors said it was a close shave for him.

UP panchayat poll count gets SC greenlight

The Supreme Court has allowed the counting of UP panchayat election results tomorrow. The State Election Commission said a curfew will be imposed near counting centresz

Amid internal dissent, Punjab Congress keenly watching results

HARPREET BAJWA @Chandigarh

THE results of the Assembly elections in four states and Puducherry are keenly watched by the ruling Congress party in Punjab. The results are coming out at a time when Congress leader and Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh is under pressure to bring the perpetrators of the sacrilege case to justice.

The party MLAs have in recent weeks demanded that the CM promise to take a time-bound action against those who defiled the sacred Guru Granth Sahib and the policemen who opened fire on those who were protesting the sacrilege in 2015.

Amarinder recently held a meeting with Congress legislators during which the MLAs conveyed to him that as the next year's Assembly elections in the state are approaching, it will be difficult for them to face the public if the government does not act on the sacrilege case.

The issue has heated up in recent weeks with cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu stepping up attacks on the CM.On Saturday, Sidhu again tweeted saying "Big Boast, Small Roast ...Big Outcry, No Outcome". The Amarinder camp within the party has countered his attacks, but the former cricketer is in no mood to give up. Now, some are hoping that the party high command may intervene and take a bold stance, once results of the Assembly polls are out.

Rallies lead to sharp increase in West Bengal cases

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kolkata

WEST BENGAL is witnessing a steep rise in Covid-19 cases and fatalities, and many health experts held month-long political extravaganzas responsible for the spread of the coronavirus in urban as well as rural regions of the state.

The state registered its highest single-day spike of 17,411 Covid-19 cases and 96 deaths on Sunday. A week ago, 12,876 new coronavirus cases and 59 deaths were reported.

Though the Centre announced a vaccination drive for all those 18 and above, the implementation on the ground in the state seems to be a task next to impossible. The chief minister announced the start of vaccinations for people in the age bracket from May 5, but an order issued by the state health department asks hospitals to give priority to those who are above 45 years old.

The state government asked the Centre to provide 2 crore vaccine doses immediately but there was no response from the central government by Saturday evening.

"Many people turned up at the state-run hospitals for vaccination but they had to return because of the shortage of vaccines. We have decided to allow the people with above 45 years on a priority basis and secure the second dose of vaccine for these set of recipients," said an official of the state government.

The private hospitals are also running short of doses and they have stopped giving the first dose, focusing on giving second doses.

Health experts found that no one other than political heavyweights is responsible for the steep spike in rural West Bengal.

"The first election day was March 27 and the state registered a single-day spike of only 812 cases and death of two persons. Now you see the figure has gone up to where. Districts in the state are registering five to eight times fresh Covid-19 cases per day compared to the figure in October, 2020, when the infection rate was at its peak. In the first wave of Covid-19, we managed to save rural regions of the state but this time the situation is alarming. This is simply because of rallies, roadshows and other political events," said an official of the state's health department.

No acute shortage of oxygen, but beds are scarce

Kolkata: Though there is no acute shortage in oxygen supply, a scarcity in hospital beds is causing panic among people in the state

Health infra

140 Covid hospitals in state

105 Govt hospitals

35 Private hospitals

13,227 Number of Covid beds

ICU/HDU beds for Covid patients 1,838

Discharge rate 84.91%

Ventilators for Covid patients 1,283

Positivity rate 7.94%

Present number of active cases in West Bengal 1,13,624

Can Congress knock BJP out of power in Assam?

PRASANTA MAZUMDAR @Guwahati

THE people of Assam are eagerly awaiting the results. Will the BJP retain power, or will the Congress stage a comeback?

Assam is significant to both the parties. For the BJP, retaining power in the state is important, not just for the party organisation, but also for the party ideology. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) had emerged as a key issue in the election.

For the Congress, which has faced a string of electoral losses in recent years, a victory in Assam will provide the much-needed oxygen. The exit polls have given an edge to the BJP-led ruling coalition which includes the regional Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL).

Similarly, 10 parties, led by the Congress, had formed a grand Opposition alliance of Opposition ahead of the polls. Its two other key constituents are minority-based All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF), which is an estranged ally of the BJP.

The elections were fought on the planks of development, welfare of state's tea garden community, Citizenship (Amendment) Act, waiving off small business loans, giving jobs to the unemployed, protecting the *satras* and the rhinos etc.

Forty-seven of the state's 126 seats, which went to first phase elections on March 27, will be decisive for the BJP. In the 2016 polls, the BJP-AGP combine had bagged 35 of them.

Rajasthan govt launches universal health scheme

RAJESH ASNANI @Jaipur

AMID a deepening Covid crisis, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Saturday launched a major health project to turn the goal of 'Health for All' into a reality.

On International Labour Day, the state launched a universal health scheme providing annual cashless insurance cover of ₹5 lakh to every family.

Under the *Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Yojna*, all families that are covered by NFSA, SECC, and other schemes for the poor and under-privileged sections of the society, have been provided free insurance. The families that are not covered under any of these programmes can avail the insurance by paying an annual installment of ₹850.

Speaking on the occasion of the launch of the scheme, CM Ashok Gehlot said, "The deprived sections of the society are also entitled to live a life of dignity, with full security available to them." The CM further stated that his government will strive to bridge the gap between rich and poor. "We also need to bridge the gap between rich and poor through social security measures. The *Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Yojna* is a historic step of the Rajasthan government in this direction. The people will no longer have to spend so much money on medical care."

Besides, all the major diseases covered under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, the Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi: Yojna will also include Covid-19 care and hemodialysis for poor patients. Gehlot claimed that this initiative of his government can be used as a model by other states. This ambitious ₹3,500-crore scheme was announced in the state budget released in February.

Jharkhand directs hosps to reserve 70% beds for Covid patients

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Ranchi

AMID a surge in Covid-19 cases in Jharkhand, the state government has directed all government and private hospitals to keep 70 per cent of beds reserved for Covid-19 patients.

Hospitals have also been asked to prepare isolation wards for Covid patients with mild symptoms so that they can be put to oxygen beds later on, in case if their oxygen saturation level dips.

The number of active cases in the state has gone up from 35,826 on April 21 to 57,716 on May 1.

"Looking at the increasing number of Covid-19 deaths and active cases, it is essential that the number of beds available for the infected patients must be increased. Therefore, it is obligatory for the hospitals engaged in the treatment of Covid-19 patients to keep 70 per cent of the total available beds reserved for Covid patients," stated the directive.

Looking at the increasing number of Covid-19 deaths and active cases, it is essential that the number of beds available be increased

Government order

"The hospitals must also prepare separate isolation wards for the Covid patients who have mild symptoms, but normal oxygen saturation level, so that they may be put to oxygen beds on priority if required," the order says.

All deputy collectors have been asked to hold a meeting with the representatives of the government and private hospitals to ensure that the government directive is fully implemented.

As of now, Jharkhand has 3,829 beds available for Covid-19 patients in 44 hospitals across the state. Another 900 beds may be added in the coming week.

Meanwhile, facing delay in vaccine supplies, the state could not launch the inoculation drive for the people in the age group of 18-44 years on Saturday.

CBSE announces policy to grade cancelled class X exams

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @New Delhi

THE Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Saturday announced a new policy for the tabulation of marks for Class X Board examinations that have been cancelled due to the pandemic.

The policy has been shared with schools affiliated with the board across India.

According to the policy, while 20 marks for each subject will be for internal assessment as every year, 80 marks will be calculated on basis of the student's performance in various tests or exams throughout the year. The board has warned the schools against indulging in unfair practices for assessment, which, if found, could lead to disaffiliation. "Schools will also have to ensure that the marks awarded by them should be in consonance with past performance of the school in class 10 board exams," a CBSE official said. The Board said that any candidate who is not satisfied with the marks allotted to him/her may be allowed to appear for an exam later on as conditions become better.

As per the guidelines, each school will constitute a result committee consisting of a principal and seven teachers for finalising the results. Of the seven teachers, five will from the school and two from a neighbouring school. Among the five teachers, there should be one Mathematics teacher, one Social Science teacher, one teacher of Natural Science, and two language teachers.

EXPRESS READ

Ukd restricts marriage attendance to 25

Chandigarh: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat on Saturday further lowered the cap on the number of people attending a marriage ceremony in the state from 100 to 25. He also authorised the district magistrates to reduce the duration for the opening of market places if they find it necessary.

PGIMER professor wins public health award

Professor Digambar Behera, senior professor and head, Department of Pulmonary Medicine at Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education & Research (PGIMER) has been awarded the 'ATS Public Service Award-2021' by the American Thoracic Society. He was earlier Dean (Research) and then Director of the National Institute of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases, New Delhi. He was also head of department of WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Capacity Building in chronic respiratory diseases. This award recognises contributions to public health related to improvement of indoor and outdoor air quality, eradication of tobacco usage, prevention of lung disease, improved management of communicable respiratory diseases and access to healthcare in areas related to lung diseases, sleep disorders and critical care. Professor Digambar Behera also won the Padma Shri award last year for his contributions to the field of medicine.

CHANDIGARH DIARY

HARPREET BAJWA
Our correspondent in Chandigarh
hsbajwa73@gmail.com

Panjab University elections postponed

After an advisory issued by the Punjab Government keeping in view the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, Panjab University Senate elections scheduled for May 3 have been postponed. In a statement the university stated that with regard to the PU Senate elections scheduled for May 3, the university had sought permission from the Punjab Government to allow gathering of more than 10 people at the polling booths. In response, the office of the Chief Secretary, Government of Punjab, advised to postpone the date of elections. The term of the Senate, the main governing body of the university, ended on October 31 of last year. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the senate elections were deferred twice. The term of the syndicate, the exectuive arm of the university, also ended last year.

Housing authority receives 105 bids for 36 dwelling units in e-auction

The Chandigarh Housing Board has received 105 bids for 36 dwelling units in the e-auction of its properties. As per the schedule all the technical bids were opened and declared qualified. Now the financial bids will be opened on May 3. These units are in Sector 38 (West) and in Sector 63. Last year no bid was received for these units but this time the response had been good as the price was reduced by 10 per cent. The highest bidder has to deposit 25 per cent of the bid amount within five working days.

Concern over fire risk in hospitals during Covid surge

Considering incidents of fire in some of the hospitals in other parts of the country especially due to sudden increase in consumption of oxygen, Chandigarh Administration has directed it's officers to be extra careful about fire issues. Today, all the fire hydrants at Hospital at Sector 48 were tested. A mock drill of fire sensing was also carried out. All the fire extinguishers have been checked, refiled and re-validated. Similarly, last week, all the fire hydrants at GMCH 32 were tested. All the medical and para-medical staff have also been sensitised to ensure that all the fire-exits should remain clear all the time and should not be blocked by the idle stretchers or trolleys.

W.H.O APPROVES MODERNA VACCINE FOR EMERGENCY USE

Geneva: World Health Organisation(WHO) has given the go-ahead for emergency use of Moderna's Covid vaccine. The mRNA vaccine joins vax from AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech and Johnson & Johnson in receiving the WHO's emergency use listing

OVER 100 MILLION AMERICANS FULLY VACCINATED

Dallas: The number of Americans fully vaccinated against Covid-19 reached another milestone: 100 million. Thirty-nine percent of the nation's adult population has been fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Oz citizens from India barred entry; 5-yr jail, fines for offenders

Temporary travel ban begins tomorrow, applies to all travellers who have visited India within 14 days of their intended arrival date in Australia

MELBOURNE

AUSTRALIAN citizens could face five-year jail term or hefty fines up to 66,000 dollars if they try to return home from India after Canberra made the journey temporarily illegal in an effort to curb the spread of the deadly viral infection in this country.

The temporary ban begins on Monday and applies to any travellers who have visited India within 14 days of their intended arrival date in Australia. India is struggling with a second wave of the pandemic with more than 3,00,000 daily new coronavirus cases being reported in the past few days.

There are an estimated 9,000 Australians in India and over 600 of them are classified as vulnerable, according to 'The Sydney Morning Herald' newspaper.

The decision was announced by the health ministry on Friday after a meeting of the National Cabinet. The decision was based on the proportion of overseas travellers in quarantine in Australia, who have contracted the infection in India, Health Minister Greg Hunt said. The move was due to an "unmanageable" number of arrivals from the country who have tested positive for Covid, he was quoted as saying by the state-run Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Breaches of the travel ban could lead to five years' imprisonment, a 66,000-Australian dollar fine or both, the report said. "Failure to comply with an emergency determination under the Biosecurity Act, 2015, may incur a civil penalty of 300 penalty units, five years' imprisonment or both," the health ministry said in a statement.

Australia's borders have been closed since March last year and, this week, the government clamped down even further, banning all flights, including repatriation dashes, from India.

According to the ABC, it is for the first time that Australia has made it a criminal offence for its own citizens to enter the country.

The ministry said the decision will be revised on May 15 following advice from the chief medical officer. The ministry statement also expressed solidarity with India, saying, "Our hearts go out to the people of India and our Indian-Australian community. The friends and family of those in Australia are in extreme risk."

Meanwhile, the government's decision has also been criticised by several people. Epidemiologist Michael Toole, from the Burnet Institute, says the decision to ban travel from India reflects the level of confidence the government has in the quarantine system. "To me it reflects a lack of confidence in the system, and I think that is a shame," Toole was quoted as saying by the ABC. *PTI*

Failure to comply with an emergency determination under the Biosecurity Act, 2015, may incur a civil penalty of 300 penalty units, five years' imprisonment or both — Health ministry statement

US to impose travel curbs from May 4

WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Joe Biden has imposed restrictions on travel from India that stops most non-American citizens from entering the US for an indefinite period from May 4, citing the surging Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

Biden issued a proclamation on Friday restricting travel from India starting on May 4. Certain categories of students, academics, journalists and individuals have been exempted from the ban, the US State Department said.

US nationals, those having green cards, their non-citizen spouses and children below 21 years of age, are among the various categories exempted from the restrictions.

"I have determined that it is in the interests of the US to take action to restrict and suspend the entry into the US, as nonimmigrants, of non-citizens of the US who were physically present within the Republic of India during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States," says the proclamation signed by Biden on Friday.

The decision has been taken at the recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), within the Department of Health and Human Services, which determined India is experiencing widespread, person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2.

Meanwhile, the US embassy in New Delhi said: "We encourage US citizens who wish to depart India to take advantage of currently available commercial flights. Airlines continue to operate dozens of direct flights weekly from India to the US. Additional flight options remain available via transfers in Paris, Frankfurt, and Doha," it said. Meanwhile, Republican lawmakers criticised President Biden for imposing restrictions on travel from India. *PTI*

Final phase of Afghanistan pullout by US, NATO begins

KABUL

THE final phase of ending America's 'forever war' in Afghanistan after 20 years formally began on Saturday, with the withdrawal of the last US and NATO troops by the end of summer. President Joe Biden had set May 1 as the official start of the withdrawal of the remaining forces — about 2,500-3,500 US troops and about 7,000 NATO soldiers. Even before Saturday, the herculean task of packing up had begun.

The military has been taking inventory, deciding what is shipped back to the US, what is handed to the Afghan security forces and what is sold as junk in Afghanistan's markets. In recent weeks, the military has been flying out equipment on massive C-17 cargo planes.

The US is estimated to have spent more than $2 trillion in Afghanistan in the past two decades, according to the Costs of War project at Brown University, which documents the hidden costs of the US military engagement. Defence department officials and diplomats said the withdrawal has involved closing smaller bases over the last year. They said that since Biden announced the end-of-summer withdrawal date in mid-April, only roughly 60 military personnel had left the country. The US and its NATO allies went into Afghanistan together on October 7, 2001, to hunt the al-Qaida perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks who lived under the protection of the country's Taliban rulers.Two months later, the Taliban had been defeated and al-Qaida fighters and their leader, Osama bin Laden, were on the run.

In his withdrawal announcement last month, Biden said the initial mission was accomplished a decade ago when US Navy SEALS killed bin Laden in his hideout in neighbouring Pakistan.

Until now, the US and NATO have received no promises from the Taliban that they won't attack troops during the pullout.

In a response to AP questions, Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said the Taliban leadership was still mulling over its strategy.

The insurgent group continues to accuse Washington of breaching the deal it signed with Biden's predecessor more than a year ago. *AP*

Labour activists shout slogans during a protest on May Day in Surabaya, on the Indonesian island of Java | AFP

WORKERS DEMAND MORE JOB PROTECTION

PARIS

WORKERS and union leaders dusted off bullhorns and flags that had stayed furled during coronavirus lockdowns for slimmed down but still boisterous May Day marches on Saturday, demanding more labour protections amid a pandemic that has turned economies and workplaces upside down.

In countries that mark May 1 as International Labour Day, the annual celebration of workers' rights produced a rare sight during the pandemic: Large and closely packed crowds, with marchers striding shoulder-to-shoulder with clenched fists behind banners. But in Turkey and the Philippines, police prevented May Day protests, enforcing virus lockdowns.

For labour leaders, the day was a test of their ability to mobilise workers in the face of the profound economic disruptions. In France, thousands took to the streets with trade union banners and flags. The face masks worn by many were a reminder of how much life has changed since the last traditional May Day celebrations, in 2019, before the spreading coronavirus wrecked lives and livelihoods and eroded civil liberties, often including the right to demonstrate.

In Indonesia, thousands vented their anger at a new job creation law that critics fear will reduce severance pay, lessen curbs for foreign workers, increase outsourcing and hurt workers in other ways as nation seeks to attract investment. *AP*

Kyrgyzstan & Tajikistan agree to pull back troops

MOSCOW

NEIGHBOURING Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have agreed to withdraw troops from their borders after an outburst of intense fighting that killed about 40 people.

The heads of national security for the two former Soviet republics in Central Asia agreed to the pullback during a meeting on Saturday. The fighting broke out on Wednesday when Tajik officials attempted to mount surveillance cameras to monitor a water supply facility near the village of Kok-Tash in Kyrgyzstan. Both nations have claimed the area around the water supply facility, a dispute dating back decades to when they were both part of the Soviet Union. Kyrgyz officials say 33 people were killed on their side and about 7,000 area residents were evacuated. Tajik officials have not announced casualties on their side, but reports say eight people were killed.

Somali prez's term extension reversed

Mogadishu: The controversial two-year term extension for Somalia's president evaporated on Saturday after intense public pressure as the lower house of parliament approved his request to instead support efforts to organise the country's long-delayed national election. President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed asked the lawm-akers to retreat from their decision earlier this month to extend his time in office.

THE COST OF 20-YEAR WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

PIC: AFP

2,442 US TROOPS KILLED

Last year was the only year US and NATO troops did not suffer a loss. The Defence Department says 2,442 US troops have been killed and 20,666 wounded since 2001

It is estimated that over 3,800 US private security contractors have been killed. The Pentagon does not track their deaths

The conflict also has killed 1,144 personnel from NATO countries

The Taliban are at their strongest since being ousted in 2001. While mapping their gains and territorial holds is difficult, they are believed to hold sway or outright control over nearly half of Afghanistan. "We are telling the departing Americans ... you fought a meaningless war and paid a cost for that and we also offered huge sacrifices for our liberation," said Taliban spokesman Shaheen.

Afghans have paid the highest price since 2001, with 47,245 civilians killed, according to the Costs of War project

Millions more have been displaced inside Afghanistan or have fled to Pakistan, Iran and Europe

Afghanistan's security forces are expected to come under increasing pressure from the Taliban after the withdrawal if no peace agreement is reached in the interim, according to Afghan watchers

Since the start of the war, the country's security forces have taken heavy losses, with estimates ranging from 66,000 to 69,000 Afghan troops killed

The US and NATO pay $4 billion a year to sustain the force

Diplomats' talks on Iran nuclear deal make progress

VIENNA

HIGH-RANKING diplomats from China, Germany, France, Russia and Britain made progress at talks on Saturday focused on bringing the United States back into their landmark nuclear deal with Iran, but said they need more work and time to bring about a future agreement.

After the meeting, Russia's top representative, Mikhail Ulyanov, tweeted that members of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), "noted today the indisputable progress made at the Vienna talks on restoration of the nuclear deal." "The Joint Commission will reconvene at the end of next week," Ulyanov wrote. "In the meantime, experts will continue to draft elements of future agreement".

The US did not have a representative at the table when the diplomats met in Vienna because former President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled the country out of the deal in 2018. Trump also restored and augmented sanctions to try to force Iran into renegotiating the pact with more concessions.

US President Joe Biden wants to rejoin the deal, however, and a US delegation in Vienna was taking part in indirect talks with Iran, with diplomats from the other world powers acting as go-betweens. The Biden administration is considering a rollback of some of the stringent Trump-era sanctions to get Iran to come back into compliance with the nuclear agreement, according to information from current and former US officials and others familiar with the matter. *AP*

यूनियन बैंक Union Bank of India

Cook Town Branch
No.9, 1st Cross, D'costa Layout Cooke Town, Bengaluru-560084
TEL: 080-22959653 E-Mail: bm0091@unionbankofindia.com

DEMAND NOTICE

UNDER SEC.13 (2) SARFAESI Act 2002

Enforcement of security interest Action Notice-In connection with the credit facilities enjoyed by the following borrowers with in the branches mentioned herein below- classified as NPA

We have to inform that you the following borrowers whose name and address [each borrower] and the name of the branches where you have availed the credit facilities offering the properties mentioned herein below. Since you have failed to repay the loan amounts as agreed by you, your following mentioned account/s has/have been classified as Non Performing Assets [NPA] as on the date mentioned herein below. The individual notice has been also already sent to, each of you demanding the due amount

1. Name and Address of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagor/Guarantor: (1) M/s Project Craft Solutions, No.22, 5th A Main Road, near Baptist Hospital, Hebbal, Bengaluru-560024. **(a) M/s Project Craft Solutions,** No.194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru. **(b) Mr. Manjunath Ravindra, Partner, M/s Project Craft Solutions,** No.194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru **(c) Ms. Shylaja, Partner, M/s Project Craft Solutions,** No.194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru. **Mr. Manjunath Ravindra, Partner,** No.655/6, 7th Cross, Bandappa St., Yeshwanthpur, Bengaluru-560022 **Ms. Shylaja, Partner,** G-001, 7th Goldline Apartments, 18/2 B, Ramaiah Road, Yeshwanthpur, Bengaluru -560022 **(2) M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd.,** No.22, 5th A Main Road, near Baptist Hospital, Hebbal, Bengaluru-560024. **(a) M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd.,** No.194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru. **(b) Mr. Vikram Prabhakar, Managing Director, M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd.,** No.22, 5th A Main Road, near Baptist Hospita, Hebbal, Bengaluru-560024. **(c) Mr. Vikram Prabhakar, Managing Director, M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd.,** No.194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru. **(d) Mr. Vikram Prabhakar, Managing Director, M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd.,** 655/6, New No. 3/1/7, "Prabhakar Mansion" , 7th Cross, Bandappa St., Yeshwanthpur, Bengaluru-560022. **e) Ms. Aishwaryaa Gummareddy Byrareddy M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd.,** No.194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru. **(f) Mr. Manjunath Ravindra, (Director, M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd).,** No .194, opp. Angadi Galleria, Near Bhashyam Circle, Sadashivanagar Main Road, Bengaluru. **Guarantor: Mr. Pradeep Kumar** 7A, Nandi Durga Road, Marappa garden, Bangalore

(1) Account Name: M/s Project Solutions Secured Over Draft - Account No.0091311000 00706 Excess allowed FITL Loan Limit Amount : Rs.1,50,00,000.00+30,00,000.00+13,85,590.00=1 ,93,85,590.00

Amount Outstanding : as on 31.03.2021, Rs. 2,12,98,705.41 (Rupees Two Crores Twelve Lakhs Ninety Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Five and Paise Forty One only)

(2) Account Name: M/s V S Infra Pvt Ltd., Account No. Secured Over Draft - Account No.0091311000 00715 Excess allowed FITL Loan: 009130100069329 Limit Amount, Rs.2,00,00,000+39,00,000+18,53,296 = 2,57,53,296.00

Amount Outstanding : as on 31.03.2021, Rs. 2,63,91,615.74 (Rupees Two Crores Sixty Three Lakhs Ninety one Thousand Six Hundred Fifteen and Paise Seventy Four only) togetherwith interest.

NPA Date : 31.03.2021 **Demand Date : 09.04.2021**

Description of the Secured Assets : Site bearing PID No.92-1-48/2, Nandidurga Road, Ward No.92, Bengaluru, site measuring 57 ft by 120 ft., in all measuring 6840 sq. ft., in the name of Mr. Pradeep Kumar.P bounded on:East by: Sy. No.110 West by: Private property, North by: Gramtana, South by: Nandidurga Road.

2) Name and Address of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagor/Guarantor: M/s AL HAYY RAEES Fabrics, Prop: Mrs. Layeekha Sultana, No.4007, Panjatan House, 1st Main Road, 1st Cross, Muniveerappa Layout, near Ganapathi Temple, A C Post, Shampur, Bengaluru-560045. **M/s AL HAYY RAEES Fabrics, Prop: Mrs. Layeekha Sultana,** Shop No.11, Sharada Complex, 381/32/1, Hebbal Kempura Main Road, Bengaluru-560024. **Guarantor: Mr. Imtiaz Ahmed** No.4007, 1st Main Road, 1st Cross, Muniveerappa Layout, A C Post, Bengaluru-560045.

Account No.: Open Cash Credit Account No. 009113100000177 Loan Limit Amount : 25,00,000.00

Amount Outstanding : as on 31.03.2021, Rs.29,04,947.41 (Rupees Twenty Nine Lakhs Four Thousand Nine hundred Forty seven and Paise Forty One only) together with interest.

NPA Date : 31.03.2021 **Demand Date : 09.04.2021**

Description of the Secured Assets : All that piece and parcel of the property bearing Site No.41, Sy.No.6/1, 1st Main Road, 1st Cross, Arabic College post, Muniveerappa Township, Shampura village, Bengaluru North Taluk in the name of Mr. Imtiaz Ahmed Khan S/o Mr. Nizamuddin Sahib measuring East to West: 40 ft., and North to South: 30 ft., and bounded on East by : Site No.9 of 2nd Main Road, West by : 1st Main Road, North by: Site No.40, South by: Site No.42.

If you fail to repay the aforesaid sum with interest and incidental expenses within 60 days from the date of this notice, Bank shall exercise all or any of the rights detailed under sub section (4) of the section 13 of the SARFAESI Act. You are also put on notice that in terms of sub section 13 of section 13, you shall not transfer by sale, lease or otherwise the said secured assets detailed above without obtaining written consent of the Bank. This notice is without prejudice to the Banks rights to initiate such other action or legal proceedings as it deem necessary under any other applicable provisions of law. Your kind attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Date : 01.05.2021 **Sd/- Authorised Officer,**
Place : Bangalore **Union Bank of India**

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the General Public that We, Smt. Sundaramma W/o Late. Sri. Anantharaman, Sri. A. Anjanmurthy S/o Late. Sri. Anantharaman, Sri. A. Ananda Murthy S/o Late. Sri. Anantharaman and Smt. Padma .D.K. W/o Sri. A. Anandamurthy. have lost the below referred Original Sale Deed pertaining to Property bearing **Site No.1157,** layout formed by Bangalore Development Authority, Situated at Sir.M. Vishweshwaraiah Layout, 5th Block, Bangalore, which is morefully described in the Schedule given hereunder and hereinafter referred to as the Schedule Property and a police complaint is filed on 29.04.2021.

Any Person who finds the below Original Sale Deed shall return the same to the undersigned.

(1) Sale Deed dated **27.10.2005,** registered as **[Document No.BDA-1-07641/2005-06]** of **Book-I,** in the Office of the Additional District Registrar, Bangalore.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

All that Piece and Parcel of the Immovable Property bearing Site No.1157, layout formed by Bangalore Development Authority, Situated at Sir. M. Vishweshwaraiah Layout, 5th Block, Bangalore,

Measurements: East to West: 9.00 Meters, North to South: 6.00 Meters

Totally Measuring: 54 Square Meters.

Together with all rights, appurtenances whatsoever whether underneath or above the surface and bounded as follows: **East by:** Road, **West by:** Site No. 1134, **North by:** Site No.1158, **South by:** Site No.1156,

If any person/institution has any claim or interest of any nature pertaining to aforesaid property and Documents, the said claims alongwith supporting documents shall be filed with undersigned within 10 days from the date of publication of this Notice at the address mentioned below. Any claims raised thereafter shall not be entertained or binding.

PRASANJITH.D. ADVOCATE
No. 251, 1st Stage, 12th Cross,
BEML Layout, Basaveshwaranagara,
Bangalore - 560079. Ph: 9343106947
(Timings: 11.00 AM to 05.00 P.M)

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the General Public that **SMT.H.R.BHARATHI** is the owner of immovable property mentioned in the schedule hereunder and she has lost the last page (Typed Page no.5) of the original Sale Deed dated 09/12/2013 bearing Document No.9320/2013-14, Book-1, stored in CD No.550, executed by Sri.P.D.Cherian (South India Baptist Bible College, Bangalore) represented by his GPA Holder Sri.Sam P.Cherian in favour of Smt.H.R.Bharathi registered in the Office of Sub-Registrar, Kengeri Bangalore, pertaining to the schedule property. In case anybody is in possession of the said document, the same shall be handover to the undersigned within **SEVEN DAYS** from the date of publication of this notice.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY : All that piece and parcel of the Property bearing Northern Portion of Site No.5, Municipality No.25/2, Katha No.73, present BBMP Katha No.1740/A/ 25/2/5, situated at Dubasipalya (Valagerahalli) Village, Kengeri Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, now within the limits of BBMP Measuring East to West 40 feet and North to South 20 feet, totally measuring 800 Square feet and bounded on:

East by : Property No.4, **West by :** 20 feet Road.
North by : Property No.1, **South by :** Southern Portion of Same Property Number.

N. JAGADEESH KUMAR, Advocate
No.276, 2nd Floor, 1st Main Road,
Chamarajpet, Bangalore-560018.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified that our client intend to mortgage property from **Mr. Shaik Abubakar** aged 50 years S/o Shaikh Buden Sab and **Mrs. Shamshad Taj** aged 40 years W/o Shaikh Abubakar, Both Residing at No. 161, 9th Cross Rashad Nagar Govindapura, Bangalore – 45.

They represents they are the joint and absolute owners in possession and enjoyment of immovable property formed in a portion of property No. 31/9, situated at Nagwara Village, Kasaba Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, presently coming under the jurisdiction of Byatrayanapura city municipal council, ward No.25 (Presently within the jurisdiction of BBMP Ward No. 23)

Having acquired the same by virtue of Absolute Sale Deed No. KCH-1-05408-2020-21, CD No. KCHD790, dated 01.03.2021 in the subregistrar office Gandhi nagar Bangalore. from **Mr. D. Abdul Razack,** Who have acquired the same by Release Deed which is registered as document No: KCH-1-01481-2016-17 and stored in CD No: KCHD209 dated 20.07.2016 and so also by Confirmation Deed in the office of sub registrar Gandhinagar Bangalore, which is more fully described in the schedule hereunder and hereinafter referred to as the schedule property.

If any individual, institution or any person has any subsisting claim, right or title in respect of the schedule property, such person may contact the undersigned within **ten days** from the date of publication of this Public Notice with all relevant documents supporting such claim. If no such claims are presented our client will proceed with the execution of Deeds to complete the formalities with the aforesaid owner of the schedule property and it shall be deemed that the same is free from all claims and encumbrances.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

All the piece and parcel of the immovable property formed in a portion of property No. 31/9, situated at Nagwara Village, Kasaba Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, presently coming under the jurisdiction of byatrayanapura city municipal council, ward No.25 (Presently within the jurisdiction of BBMP Ward No. 23) Bengaluru also postal address known as door No: 5, 10th Cross, "A" block, Rashad Nagar, Ibrahim Saheb Street Arabic College Post, Bengaluru :560045 and bounded as follows; **East by :** Road, **West by :** Private Property **North by :** Road; **South by :** Property belonging to Syed Nasir

Measuring on East to West : 35 feet
North to South : 22 feet
Totally Measuring 770 square feet.

C.R.A. ASSOCIATES
Advocates & Consultants
#331, 4th 'B' Cross, HRBR Layout
Bangalore-43

SUMMONS/ NOTICE FOR SERVICE BY ADVERTISEMENT IN A NEWSPAPER UNDER ORDER 5 RULE 20 OF C.PC
IN THE COURT OF THE HON'BLE CITY CIVIL JUDGE AT BANGALORE
O. S. No. 9252/ 2019 (CCH-57)

BETWEEN : SMT. BHAGYA ...Plaintiff
AND : SMT. GAURAMMA AND OTHERS ...Defendants

UNDER ORDER V RULE 20 READ WITH SECTION 151 OF THE CODE OF CIVIL PROCEDURE, 1908 BY WAY OF PAPER PUBLICATION ISSUE NOTICE TO DEFENDANTS

1. SMT. GAURAMMA
W/o B A Muniraju, Aged about 48 years.
2. SMT. LAKSHMAMMA
W/o B A Narayana, Aged about 46 years.
3. SMT. VARALAKSHMI
W/o B A Krishna, Aged about 41 years.
All are R/at Near Om Shakthi Temple, Madiwala Post, Bommanahalli Begur Hobli, Bengaluru South Taluk, Bengaluru 560 068.

WHEREAS the plaintiff has instituted the above case against the defendants for seeking permanent injunction and such other relief with respect of the Schedule property. You are hereby summoned to appear before this court either in person or by a pleader on **25.05.2021 at 11.00 AM** to answer the same, failing which the case will be disposed off ex-parte.

SCHEDULE

All that piece and parcel of the immovable property bearing property No.72/1, Khatha No.13, Khaneshumari No.90 & 79, situated at Gramatana Area of Bommanahalli Village, Begur Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, presently comes under BBMP Limits, measuring East to West 40 feet and North to South 30 feet, totally measuring 1200 Sq. ft and bounded on the **East by :** Property belongs to Ankanna Venkataswamy, **West by :** Path-way, **North by :** Government Road, **South by :** Property belongs to P. Ramaiah.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court this 21.04.2021.

BY ORDER OF THE COURT, Asst Registrar, City Civil Court Bangalore

Advocate for Plaintiff:
SRI. CHENNAKESHAVA B S, Advocate
"H & C Law Chambers", Unit No.64/1, 5th Floor, #39/2, A.S.V.N.V Bhavan, K G Road, Bangalore 560 009.

QuoteExpress
THE ONLY CONSTANT IN THE TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY IS CHANGE › MITCHELL KAPOR

$584.10 bn was India's forex reserve as of April 23, according to RBI data. This was an increase of $1.701 billion over the previous week

NEWSCOPE

Whither Atmanirbhar Bharat?

GURBIR SINGH

ON May 12, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, announced his five-point 'Atmanirbharta Mission', and defined it thus: "The state of the world today teaches us that (AtmaNirbhar Bharat) "Self-reliant India" is the only path. It is said in our scriptures — EshahPanthah. That is, self-sufficient India".

Since then, 'self-reliance' and 'self-sufficiency' have been the underlying theme of the economic stimulus packages of October and November, last year, and of this year's Union Budget. But, driven to its knees in the last 2-3 weeks as Covid infections register over 3.5 lakh a day, the government's 'Atmanirbharta' campaign is in tatters.

Swallowing its pride the Indian government is lobbying and accepting aid from everywhere. The US is sending immediate supplies worth over $100 million. This will include 1,000 oxygen cylinders, 15 million N-95 masks and 1 million rapid diagnostic tests. On the way too are 20-30 million AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccines from a 60-million stockpile that the US has no use for. Even China, whose goods faced a boycott call post the border clashes, has lined up much-needed medical equipment.

Disasters and national pride

So where is our national pride? Something has obviously gone wrong. Disasters are not new to India, and it has been our humiliating record that we have had to repeatedly turn to international aid to meet a crisis whether it was the Latur Earthquake in 1993 or the Bengal cyclone in 2003.

It was finally in 2004 that the policy changed and then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stood up and proclaimed India would do its own disaster management without outside aid.

His 'atmanirbharta' policy continued through nearly two decades. As recently as 2018, during the Kerala floods, we turned down ₹700 crore in aid promised by the UAE. Now there is a reversal, with even the PM-Cares Fund accepting donations from abroad.

A policy of self-reliance is not a simple matter of choice. It is the path of foreseeing the needs of the future and then building the necessary infrastructure, and a cache of resources.

Tackling Covid, after the peak of mid-September, the curve flattened and complacency set in. It was felt the nation was past the worst. People went back to normal life. The country's medical infrastructure, geared to combat Covid-19, began to be dismantled ignoring the experience of other countries like France and Spain that saw a spurt of infections in a second and even a third wave.

The sentiment was only worsened by the Modi government declaring 'victory' prematurely, and celebrating publicly. "When the battle against Covid-19 just started, concern was raised that such a vast country like India will get devastated due to the dearth of resources. But, India has shown that if you have resolved to do something with resilience, it takes little time for readying the resources," Modi said on January, 22 addressing a convocation at Tezpur University.

But the second wave since 15 April has proved our health infrastructure has crumbled and people are dying not so much of the infection as much as from lack of medical intervention, and shortage of oxygen and hospital beds. The legend of people searching for oxygen cylinders as their loved ones gasped their last in hospitals will remain long after this crisis.

Preparing for the worst

While the government should have been ramping up infrastructure to face a worse second wave from March 2021, it worked the other way. IndiaSpend.org disclosed between December 2020 and April 2021, the number of dedicated Covid hospitals fell by six per cent. Again there were 2,55,168 oxygen-supported beds in the country on April 9, 2021. Though this is more than double the 115,134 million beds in May 2020, hospitals began to be dismantled from December onwards, and the number of beds were six per cent fewer since December 2020.

Many oxygen plants in the pipeline were never set up, lulled by the belief that the pandemic was over. Disaster management is based on planning for 'the-worst-is-yet-to-come'. India's daily production capacity for oxygen is around 7,127 metric tonnes (MT) while the consumption of medical oxygen on April 12 was 3,842 MT.

Our oxygen capacity and stock was "comfortably more than daily consumption", the government said on April 15, 2021, little realizing the tsunami was yet to come. By April 21, appearing before the Delhi High Court in a petition by a hospital that had 400 patients facing death due to oxygen running out, the Union government admitted that in a week the demand had skyrocketed to 8,000 MT a day!

On vaccinations, which is our long term cover, it is the story of failing to understand demand and supply. Between Bharat Biotech (Covaxin) and Serum Institute of India (Covishield) the country has the capacity to produce 83 million doses a month. After 3 months since February, we have administered one dose to only 118 million, or less than 10 per cent of the population.

At this rate, to reach 60 per cent coverage, which is the minimum threshold level that will give us herd immunity, will take another 15 months. This too looks unachievable as the supply is short of paper claims. As many as 10 states have suspended their inoculation programmes. So the fallback is again on imports. Or, grants?

Dr Devi Prasad Shetty, noted cardiac surgeon and chairman of Narayana Health, Bangalore, has projected India will need an additional five lakh ICU beds to the current stock of 90,000; as well as two lakh nurses and 1.5 lakh doctors, to handle the current wave.

Unfortunately, these can't be imported!

The collection in April this year is over 14% higher than the previous record in March

At ₹1.41 lakh cr, GST revenue sets new record

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

THE Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue collection for April 2021 hit yet another peak of ₹1,41,384 crore. This was over 14 per cent higher than the previous record of ₹1,23,902 crore in March, and an increase of nearly 24 per cent when compared to ₹1.13 lakh crore collected in the same month last year. With the latest figures, the GST collections maintained the ₹1 lakh crore benchmark trend for the seventh consecutive month.

"Despite the second wave of coronavirus pandemic affecting several parts of the country, Indian businesses have once again shown remarkable resilience by not only complying with the return filing requirements but also paying their GST dues in a timely manner during the month," the finance ministry said in a statement on Saturday. Of the total collections, central GST amounts to about ₹27,837 crore, state GST is ₹35,621 crore, integrated GST is ₹68,481 crore (including ₹29,599 crore collected on import of goods) and ₹9,445 crore cess.

According to the government, close monitoring against fake-billing, deep data analytics using data from multiple sources including GST, Income-tax and customs IT systems and effective tax administration have also contributed to the increase in this month's revenue. "These are clear indicators of sustained economic recovery during this period," the statement noted.

Experts, however, have dismissed the claim and said that these GST figures reflect transactions in March, but collected in April. The real impact of lockdown will be reflected in the collection of May and June. "The all-time high collections, which relate to supplies made on March, could now give way to muted collections in the coming months due to the lower economic activities in April," said MS Mani, senior director, Deloitte India.

EXPRESS READ

BHIM UPI transactions slow to ₹4.94 lakh crore

New Delhi: The growth of digital transactions eased in April, but remained higher than that of February. According to data released by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) on Saturday, transactions on the UPI scaled down from the ₹5 lakh crore peak it had touched in March. In value terms, UPI transactions fell 2.2 per cent to ₹4.94 lakh crore on a month-on-month basis. As many as 264 crore transactions were processed on UPI during the month, down by 3.3 per cent from 273 crore in March.

TIMELINE EXTENSION

e-file your ITR by May 31 as govt extends deadline

New Delhi: The government on Saturday extended timelines for various income tax compliances, including the filing of belated or revised return for the 2019-20 fiscal, till May 31. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said it had received representations from various stakeholders for relaxation on compliance requirements.

"In view of the adverse circumstances arising due to the severe pandemic and also in view of the several requests received from taxpayers, tax consultants & other stakeholders from across the country, requesting that various compliance dates may be relaxed, the government has extended certain timelines today," an official statement said.

Filing of belated return under sub-section (4) and revised return under sub-section (5) of Section 139 of the Act, for Assessment Year 2020-21, which was required to be filed on or before March 31, 2021, maybe filed on or before May 31, 2021, the CBDT said. Income-tax return in response to notice under Section 148 of the Act, for which the last date of filing of return of income under the said notice is April 1, 2021, or thereafter, may be filed within the time allowed under that notice or May 31.

Also, the due date for filing objections to Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP) and filing appeals to the commissioner has been extended till May 31. Nangia & Co LLP Partner Shailesh Kumar said the government has given relaxation to taxpayers for various compliances till May 31, 2021. Even the timeline for filing belated/ revised ITR for FY 2019-20, which expired on March 31 has been revised and now taxpayers can e-file their ITRs by May 31. *PTI*

Covid blow 2.0 : SpiceJet defers salaries of staff

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

WITH the second wave of the pandemic raging across the country and citizens choosing to stay indoors, revenue-strapped private carrier SpiceJet has decided to defer up to 50 per cent of the April salary of its employees. The deferred salaries, it said, will be paid when the situation improves.

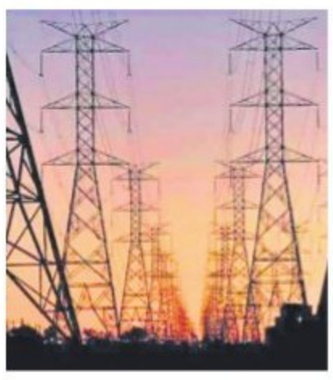
"The domestic passenger traffic across all airlines which had peaked at more than 300,000 passengers per day in mid-February 2021 (showing signs of recovery), has now drastically dropped to less than 130,000 passengers per day. In this backdrop, the company has once again been compelled to implement certain tough economic measures to secure the long term interest of our SpiceJet family," the airline's vice-president (Operations), Gurcharan Arora informed pilots on Saturday. According to SpiceJet employees, ground staff, cabin crew, commercial staff and pilots have been paid 10-50 per cent of the April salary while junior employees, including loaders and drivers, have received their monthly payment in full for the month.

Last year, when there was a complete lockdown of domestic and international operations, many airlines, including Spicejet, rationalised their working capital by cutting down salaries. This year, again, while airlines are facing a difficult environment to bounce back from the lows of last week when operations were completely suspended for months, the rise in Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices are expected to hurt the sector further.

Though it is expected that the loss will be lesser compared to the last fiscal (2020-21) at 35-40 per cent and around ₹9,500-10,000 crore. These findings were a result of a study by CRISIL Ratings of the top three airlines, which account for 78 per cent of the total passenger traffic.

> **The salary deferment (of between 10 per cent to 50 per cent) in the higher pay grades is a temporary measure to survive this economic crisis...** —Gurcharan Arora, vice-president (Operations), SpiceJet

APRIL POWER CONSUMPTION FALLS MARGINALLY



ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Chennai

INDIA's power consumption data for April already shows signs of an impact caused by the second Covid-19 wave, which began accelerating to record proportions in the second half of the month. While the low base of April last year-the month which saw the strictest nationwide lockdown imposed so far-has helped show a 41 per cent year-on-year growth in power consumption for April at 119.27 billion units (BU), the figure is lower than the 121.51 BU in March.

Analysts note that the high growth is primarily due to the largescale dip recorded in April last year, when consumption crashed to 84.55 BU from 98.95 BU in March 2020. March 2020's figure had also been lower than February 2020's 103.81 BU, as the toll of the local movement restrictions late March began to hit industrial consumption, which eventually dived after the nationwide lockdown imposed for April 2020.

Consumption had since recovered to the point where peak power demand met during the first week of April 2021, the highest supply recorded in a day, hit an all-time high of 182.55 GW. However, the local lockdowns across states to contain the second wave is set to impact commercial and industrial power consumption adversely going forward, cautioned analysts.

SBI cuts home loan interest rate to 6.7%

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

THE country's largest lender, State Bank of India (SBI) on Saturday said it has reduced home loans rates to 6.7 per cent. With the reduction, SBI home loan interest rates now start from 6.7 per cent for loans up to ₹30 lakhs and 6.95 per cent for loans above ₹30 lakhs and up to 75 lakh. The big-ticket loans above ₹75 lakhs would get home loans at 7.05 per cent, the bank said.

Customers can also apply for a loan from the ease of their home via the YONO App to earn an additional interest concession of 5 bps, SBI said. Women borrowers will get a special concession of 5 bps.

"The affordability for the consumer increases immensely with the present home loan interest rate offerings which reduce the EMI amounts substantially," said C S Setty, MD (Retail & Digital Banking).

Separately, private sector lender IDFC First Bank said it will cut the interest rate on savings accounts from six per cent to 4-5 percent for accounts with a balance of more than ₹1 lakh and up to ₹2 crore with immediate effect. The bank is offering an interest rate of four per cent for accounts with a balance of ₹2-10 crore, five per cent for balances up to ₹2 crore and 4.5 per cent for ₹1-10 lakh.

Business & Beyond

Bank of Maharashtra net profit jumps on higher NII growth

Bank of Maharashtra reported a 187 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at `165 crore in the quarter ended March 31, 2021, helped by higher growth in net interest income and better recoveries. The lender had reported a profit after tax of ₹58 crore in the corresponding quarter of the fiscal 2019-20. For the full FY21, its net profit grew by 42 per cent to ₹550 crore from ₹389 crore in the year-ago period. NII increased to ₹1,383 crore while fee-based income rose 22 per cent to ₹315 crore in the latest quarter and other income went up 86 per cent to ₹727 crore. The bank has started expanding its network across South India and aims to open 18 new branches in this region.

GRSE observes 75 years of India's Independence, releases in-house journal

Defence PSU Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd. (GRSE) celebrated the country's 75 years of Independence — Aazadi ka Amrit Mahotsav. The highlight of the commemorations was the e-release of GRSE's annual In-house journal VARTA 2021 by Governor of West Bengal Jagdeep Dhankhar in the presence of Rear Admiral V. K. Saxena, IN (Retd.) GRSE CMD, Cmde Sanjeev Nayyar, Director (Shipbuilding) and other senior officials of GRSE.

SER runs oxygen express trains to meet states' requirement

South Eastern Railway is continuously transporting Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) across the country as per the requirement of the states. The sixth and seventh oxygen express trains of South Eastern Railway (SER) left Bokaro Steel City on April 28 and April 29 for Lucknow and Varanasi, respectively. The two trains carried 109.47 tonnes of LMO filled up in seven tankers. There are three more trains on the run either carrying liquid oxygen or on the way to the loading plants. It is expected that cumulative LMO carried by Indian Railways will reach almost 640 MT in next 24 hrs, according to an official statement.

Auto companies see sales drop in April over March

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

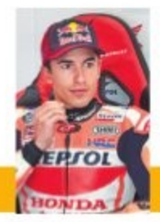
A large number of carmakers on Saturday reported sequential fall in April sales as the second wave of Covid-19 infection prompted regional lockdowns and impacted buyers' sentiment. The fall, however, is much lower than sales of two-wheelers.

Country's largest passenger vehicle (PV) maker Maruti Suzuki sold 137,151 units in April 2021 as against 146,203 units in March 2021 while Hyundai's domestic sales fell from 52,600 units March to 49,002 units in April. Tata Motors PV sales stood at 25,095 units in April as against 29,654 units in March while Kia Motors logged domestic sales of 16,111 units in April, down from 19,100 units in March.

Meanwhile, Mahindra's domestic PV sales stood at 18,285 units, up nine per cent sequentially, while Honda Cars India also reported a 28 per cent increase in domestic sales. But, these carmakers expect the coming months to be challenging.

Among two-wheeler makers, Hero MotorCorp reported a significant dip in March sales. Hero, which has temporarily halted production at its facilities, sold 372,285 units in April as against 5,76,957 units in March. The company has also decided to extend the shutdown till May 9, 2021.

Marquez 14th after crash as Quartararo takes pole



Six-time world champion **Marc Marquez** qualified 14th on Saturday for the Spanish MotoGP after a spectacular crash in morning practice at Jerez while Fabio Quartararo claimed pole position. Marquez fell heavily in the third practice session at the circuit where last year he broke his right arm in the opening race to end his 2020 campaign.

Rowers to hire equipment in Tokyo

FIROZ MIRZA @Chennai

GIVEN the situation due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Indian rowers eyeing Olympic quotas in the upcoming qualifying event will get to see their equipment including boats for the first time only on Sunday.

The Indian team comprising 14-member reached Tokyo late on Friday to compete in the World Rowing Asia Oceania Continental Olympic and Paralympic Qualifying Regatta. The event is slated from May 5 to 7. However, the national team members didn't carry their equipment to Tokyo due to the existing situation.

"It was not easy to carry equipment. We will hire equipment tomorrow (Sunday)," Ismail Baig, chief coach, told this daily from Tokyo. Baig admitted that it will not be easy for his wards to get used to the new equipment but remained upbeat while talking about the rowers' chances in the event. "We are quite optimistic as all the rowers have trained hard for this event. We will be competing in the single and double scull in both men's and women's categories."

In order to qualify, a rower has to finish in top-5 in single scull while in double scull, a rower has to finish in top-three to make an Olympic cut.

After reaching Tokyo, each team member was subjected to an RT-PCR test and has been given a single room in a hotel. They are not allowed to meet each other. "We are in constant touch with each other via phone. The protocols are strict but we are abiding by them," added the chief coach.

The men's team consists of Jakar Khan, Arjun Jat and Arvind Singh while Sunil Attri is kept in reserve. Similarly, the women's team comprises Khushpreet Kaur, Vindhya Sankat and Rukmani Dangi. Sona Kheer will be in reserve. Shantanu Tripathi is the lone Indian rower who will compete in the Paralympic event.

Before leaving for the event, the men rowers had trained at the Army Sports Institute in Pune while the women had trained in Bhopal.

Wait and watch policy for women archers

ASHIM SUNAM @Bengaluru

THE second wave of Covid-19 in the country has also hit Indian athletes aiming to book their Tokyo Olympic tickets. With the quadrennial event less than 100 days away, the India women's archery team can still qualify as a squad, with the World Cup Stage 3 in Paris a lifeline.

But, the question remains if they would even be able to head to the European nation. It could all depend on the pandemic situation. As of now, several countries have implemented travel restriction from India, with France being one of them. There is a mandatory ten-day quarantine for Indian travellers in France. Interestingly, India has an air bubble arrangement with many nations including France.

If the situation worsens and the archers are not able to feature in Paris, it would mean Deepika Kumari will be the lone woman representative from India in Tokyo. The Archery Association of India (AAI) president Arjun Munda wants to take a collective decision on a later date, but wants all his archers to continue with the preparation for the Olympics as well as the trials. "Stating that there is a ban or something, we cannot take a decision on the future right now. In the coming days, we also have to see if the flight continues or it resumes. In the meantime, I can assure you that the archers will continue with their full preparations for the Olympic and the trials that they have to go," said Munda.

Irrespective of what happens, the situation is better in the men's arena with Atanu Das, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav set to feature in Tokyo. In fact, recently India came up with a strong showing in the Archery World Cup Stage 1 in Guatemala as Atanu and Deepika won gold in their respective individual categories. Besides, Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari won the team gold in the women's competition. The mixed team also finished with bronze. After returning home with three gold and a bronze, the archers were felicitated in an online program on Saturday. IOA president Narinder Batra, SAI director general Sandip Pradhan and Munda also graced the occasion.

"I think this world cup stage 1 started in 2006 and it is the first time that India has won three gold and one bronze," said Batra. "We hope for medals from archery in Olympics... all the best to the athletes, who won medals (in stage 1)."

EXPRESS READ

Gangjee T-9 in Japan, three behind leaders

NAGOYA: Indian golfer Rahil Gangjee hung in superbly with an even par 72 in the second round to stay in the top-10 of the truncated Crowns meet here. He is now 4-under and three behind the leader and tied-9th. The meet has been reduced to 54 hours after the cancellation of the first round due to inclement weather on Thursday.

India's Pro League campaign from Feb 5

BENGALURU: The Indian men's hockey team will open its campaign in the third edition of FIH Pro League against New Zealand on February 5 next year as the FIH released the schedule. India will also take on Australia and Spain in February as they plays five away matches that month before taking on Germany and Argentina at home.

Bottas claims pole position in Portugal

PORTIMAO (PORTUGAL): Valtteri Bottas took pole position for the Portuguese GP with seven-time world champ Lewis Hamilton completing a Mercedes front-row lockout in qualifying on Saturday. Hamilton's pursuit of a 100th pole at the track where last year he notched up his record 92nd win was delayed when Bottas earned the 17th of his career.

OUR IPL SPACE

FACELESS DOCTOR & HIS NARRATIVE

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN @Chennai

WHEN you X-ray your lungs, the colour you are most likely to see is black. In end-stage pneumonia, one of the most common Covid-19 related complications, the X-ray looks white. Why? When the Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) is severe, almost the entire lung becomes white as it's full of fluid.

For one doctor who has been doing non-stop Covid shifts since the pandemic began last January, seeing that particular image is an all too familiar foreboding, an indication of the virus claiming another victim. The doctor, who spoke to the paper on condition of anonymity, has become numb. 'Used to it now, unfortunately," he says. Death is the major tune in hospitals across India right now and this doctor, who works at one in Mysore, has seen his fair share in the last year. "Quite a lot," he says. "Can't really put a number on them."

But that's just one side of the story. That India's health infrastructure is close to breaking point is known. What's not been published in detail is the toll it's taking on the healthcare workers. While some can afford to stay at home, doctors have had to move their home to work to meet the excess demands unfairly placed on them. The burden is so much that once their shift is over, they just have relief on their faces. "It's a mixed feeling," he says. "On the one hand, you are exhausted because of all the dehydration (because of the huge PPEs) and fatigue. On the other hand, you are so relieved that the shift is over and you can rest a bit."

That in itself is not a given. He corroborates stories of doctors being asked to do double shifts. "When we had Covid spikes, we refused to do any more than six hours in the ICU, because you work with huge PPEs which are quite suffocating to work with in long hours. So there were four shifts a day. Sometimes, if we were short on personnel, we would combine two night shifts (for example 9.00 pm to 3.00am and 3.00am to 9.00am into a 9.00 - 9.00 am)."

That's before you throw in the task of fighting with the management to ensure minimum standards of human rights are met. "We actually fought with the higher-ups to ensure we don't have too much exposure by having fixed shifts and only managing one ward/ICU at a time, involving all departments (because no non-Covid admissions)," the doctor, who is in his final year of MD, reveals.

Doctors and medical staff across the country have been under tremendous pressure with rising number of cases. File picture of doctors in New Delhi | EXPRESS

However, limiting exposure is a bit like sticking plaster to stop a knife wound. For one, this doctor, who works in a government set-up, himself caught it during the first wave. He is well aware of that danger but says all he can do is carry on 'with my job'. "Initially, we were scared. I think around half of all the residents caught it, couple of us required oxygen but all of us recovered. We know that there's a chance of us catching the disease at any time but almost all of us have been vaccinated and we take full precautions. We don't think about the chance of being infected and just carry on with our jobs the best we can."

And he, like many others, makes the observation that more young people are ill. "One major difference we have seen during this wave is how there's suddenly a larger proportion of younger patients being affected compared to last year. We have seen people in their 20s and 30s with no co-morbid conditions die due to severe pneumonia which is a little scary."

Even if it looks like the hospital is being gripped by the killer virus, there is one high point. "When I inform relatives that their fathers or mothers or sisters or brothers or wives are recovering, you can see the relief on their faces. Honestly, that's the most satisfying aspect of this job at least in my opinion.

The next two days, he will be on night shift. He will either see more images of lungs looking white like sheet or inform relatives that their family is making progress.

CORONAVIRUS
LIFELINES

indiacovidresources.in
For resources in different cities. Also available as an app.

ICLU_Ind
Twitter handle. For real-time leads.

Note: Only go for verified leads. There have been multiple reports of people selling fake medicines.

747
Number of doctors who have passed away after contracting the disease according to the Indian Medical Association registry (figures from April third week).

How Covid pneumonia kills

So Covid pneumonia usually affects what we call the interstitium. It's not actually involved in transporting gases to the blood but as the disease progresses the patient goes into what we call ARDS — acute respiratory distress syndrome where the parts of the lung involved in exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide become filled with fluid so the lung is now unable to utilize the inhaled oxygen. So the patient's oxygen levels dip. This is usually what causes the death. Basically the lungs look black on an xray and bones, liquid look white.
When the ARDS is severe, almost the entire lung becomes white as its full of fluid.

Bromell clocks year's best in Florida meet

AFP @Miami

TRAYVON Bromell of the United States set a world-leading 9.88sec with 100m victory at an invitational meet in Florida on Friday, continuing his impressive start to the season after years dogged by injuries.

Bromell, racing at the University of North Florida Invitational near his training base at Jacksonville, powered home ahead of Canada's Olympic bronze medallist Andre DeGrasse, who was second in 10.05sec.

Divine Oduduru was third while France's Jimmy Vicaut finished fourth with a time of 10.17.

Bromell's blistering run came after a 100m victory at the Oregon Relays in Eugene last weekend, where he defeated world 200m champion Noah Lyles in 10.01sec. The 25-year-old Bromell's form suggests he is now firmly in the frame as a potential 100m gold medallist at this year's Tokyo Olympics.

Bromell's return to form comes after a career that had been blown off course by a catalogue of injuries.

He exploded onto the athletics scene in 2015, when he ran a personal best time of 9.84sec for the 100m before his 20th birthday — the fastest time ever run by a teenager over the distance -- before later claiming a bronze at that year's World Championships in Beijing. He won gold in the 60m at the World Indoor championships in Portland in 2016, but suffered disappointment at the Rio Olympics that year.

Man City two good, edge closer to title

AFP @London

MANCHESTER City are within touching distance of the Premier League title after Sergio Aguero and Ferran Torres sealed a 2-0 win at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola's side sit 13 points clear at the top and will be crowned champions if second-placed Manchester United lose against Liverpool on Sunday.

After a tepid first half in south London, it was fitting that Aguero — the architect of so many big moments in City's history — should open the scoring with a typically lethal finish. Torres killed off Palace two minutes later as City eased to an 11th successive away victory in the Premier League, equalling the English top-flight record.

Even if United do not slip up against Liverpool at Old Trafford, City have four matches left to secure the one win they need to clinch the title, starting with next Saturday's home game against Chelsea.

It is a matter of when not if City add the Premier League to the League Cup they won against Tottenham in April.

"We can start to think about it and put it in the fridge. The Premier League is already there, it is in our hands. We need one more victory," Guardiola said..

Manchester City's Sergio Aguero celebrates scoring his team's first goal against Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park in south London, on Saturday | AFP

Leicester held
SOUTHAMPTON: Leicester missed a chance to cement their grip on third place after a 1-1 draw against 10-man Southampton at St Mary's on Friday. Southampton had to play 80 minutes without Danish defender Jannik Vestergaard after he was sent off for a foul on Jamie Vardy. Southampton's James Ward-Prowse scored the opening goal. Jonny Evans headed Leicester's equaliser.

Atletico post win
MADRID: Atletico Madrid were given a huge let-off on Saturday as Elche missed a 91st-minute penalty, allowing the La Liga leaders to escape with a 1-0 win and go five points clear at the top of the table. Elche's Fidel Chaves struck the post with his injury-time spot-kick in what could prove a pivotal moment in Spain's thrilling title race, with Real Madrid, Barcelona and Sevilla all still in the hunt.

SAI drive to get more ex-athletes as coaches

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

PRETTY soon, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) could have a host of former Indian stars line up as coaches in various disciplines. For SAI has invited former Indian athletes, ones who have taken part in elite events like the World Championships and the Olympics, to join as coaches and assistant coaches at SAI. The positions for coaches and assistant coaches in 21 disciplines have also been made open to Dronacharya awardees. Ones who hold sports coaching diploma degrees from NSNIS Patiala or other Indian or foreign universities.

According to the sports ministry, the initiative was to include as many international athletes to guide youngsters in their endeavour to excel for the country. It also aims at giving opportunity to athletes who had represented the country to give something back to the sport. "With an eye on being one among the top 10 nations in the Olympics in 2028, the forward planning entails the inclusion of top Indian sportspersons and coaches into the sports ecosystem so that they can identify and train athletes from a young age. I am confident that this decision will have a long-term impact on creating future champions," sports minister Kiren Rijiju said in a statement. Many ex-international athletes and Dhronacharya awardees have viewed this opportunity with enthusiasm and according to SAI more than 300 former international athletes have shown interest to join SAI. The last date of application will be around May 20. It will be on a contract basis, which can be extended.

TRICKY TIMES

Gokulam hope to navigate Covid hurdles and start activities by July end

MARTIN JOSEPH @Kochi

GOKULAM KERALA FC were in a similar situation prior to last season when the nationwide lockdown affected club activities like their pre-season preparations, signing of players and training.

However, the Kerala-based outfit went on to have a hugely successful campaign as they became the first team from the state to win a national league title by claiming the I-League.

With expectations high and the club set to participate in the AFC Cup in the upcoming season, the club is expected to refresh the squad and start the planning process well in advance.

However, the second wave of Covid-19 has brought its own problems like signing of players — primarily the foreign players, preparing for pre-season and on-field activities.

"After our recent success, we have a big season ahead of us. We have been in this situation before during the time of the last lockdown and it was tricky navigating that situation. But it had to be done and this time around, the situation is much worse. We hope that we can start planning for next season and begin training and other activities by the end of July. Hopefully, we can assemble the squad by then. But we'll have to wait and see if the situation improves," said Gokulam technical director Bino George.

While convincing foreign players to come to India would be a challenge, the club faces another challenge as they've been put under a one-year transfer ban by the All India Football Federation over a contract dispute with one of their former players.

Gokulam technical director Bino George

Bino feels that they will be able to successfully overturn it while suggesting that they are ready to look for other ways to prepare themselves for next season. "Last year, we put a lot of faith in our academy players who were promoted to the senior team and they played an important part in the title victory. Our reserve team won the recent Kerala Premier League title and we have some good players coming through. It is our policy to promote Indian and local players and we will give them the opportunity. Regarding the transfer ban, we are confident of successfully appealing and overturning it," he said. Gokulam head coach Vincenzo Alberto Annese is expected to return to India soon but a lot will depend on the travel restrictions owing to the Covid situation.

"The coach has already started putting together a plan for next season. It was very similar like last year as we relied a lot on virtual meetings and WhatsApp groups to carry out club operations when we were all in different places. Hopefully, things get better soon for everyone," said Bino.

Civil unrest and military exercises pose heightened risks to more than 200 threatened species, including elephant and critically-endangered Eastern gorilla, conservationists warned. A report from International Union for Conservation of Nature examined the close interplay between environment and armed conflict, warning that human violence and unrest were taking a devastating toll on nature.

383FEET THE LENGTH OF THE WINGSPAN, THE LONGEST FOR ANY AIRPLANE

THE HUMUNGOUS AIRCRAFT HAS TWO COCKPITS. WITH THE HELP OF SIX ENGINES, IT HAS A MAXIMUM LOAD CAPACITY OF 1.3M POUNDS

ENGINES

Six Boeing 747 engines allow for a payload capacity of over 226,796 kg, says its website

Initial projected cost was reportedly $300 million in 2019. it is valued much higher at $400 now

50,000 pounds weight without cargo

28 number of wheels it needs to take-off and land

EXFILE • TECHNOLOGY

FLIGHT OF FANCY

The aircraft performed its second test flight on Thursday and flew from Mojave Air and Space Port. It was originally developed by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, who died last year. The new owners want to launch hypersonic vehicles.

FIRST FLIGHT

14,000 FEET THE ALTITUDE IT REACHED DURING ITS SECOND TEST FLIGHT

03:14MIN TIME IT WAS AIRBORNE

329KM PER HOUR TOP SPEED IT REACHED DURING THE FLIGHT

NEW DIMENSION

The Stratolaunch Roc at 117m has the widest wingspan. Even the largest carrier Antov at 88.4m is dwarfed in comparison. Here's a look at other planes

A QUICK GLANCE

The innovative dual-fuselage and high-wing design allow launch vehicles to release from the aircraft centerline and below the wing for a much safer deployment. Though initial intention was to use it as a carrier aircraft for space launches, now it intended for launches of hypersonic vehicles

50 FEET It stands at feet tall from the ground to the top of its vertical tail

500,000 POUNDS

The weight carrier's carbon fiber reinforced centre wing can support

THE ROC AND THE CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY

The Roc carrier was designed to launch hypersonic vehicles/rockets the air instead of conventional take off from the land. When air-launch-to-orbit is done from an conventional horizontal take-off with the payload, the rocket's mass reduces because it need not carry extra fuel as it can avoid the drag force in the lower dense atmosphere. This in turn will help to attain greater thrust in the entire operation time. Air launch can also avoid foul weather because it can fly around the system to a better site for launch.

1.3M LB Its max takle-off capacity

35,000 feet The maximum altitude it can climb

600 km The distance it can travel

How donkeys digging wells help life thrive in the desert

The animals are not native to Americas and are considered harmful agents of bio-diversity but a study finds them helpful to thirsty animals in accessing water

ENVIRONMENT

WASHINGTON: For thousands of years, horses and donkeys have been some of our species' most important partners.

A new study published Thursday shows they're also friends to desert animals and plants, by digging deep wells that provide a vital source of water, especially at the height of summer. Biologist Erick Lundgren, lead author of the paper in Science, told AFP he first began noticing the phenomenon while working in western Arizona as a field technician studying river systems.

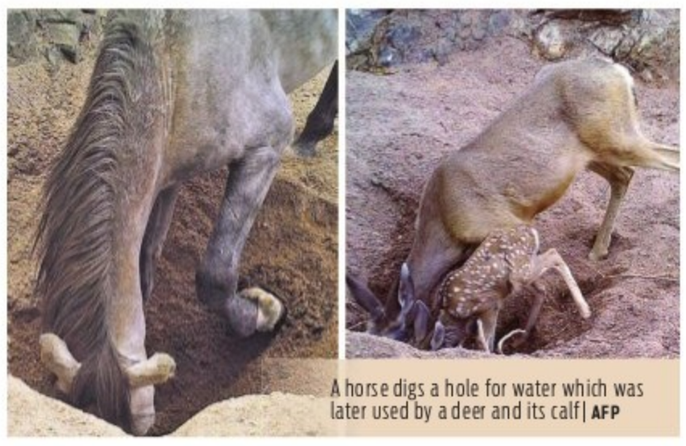
"People just didn't think it was worthy of scientific attention," said the scientist, who is now at the University of Technology Sydney. Lundgren had read about African elephants digging wells that were the only source of water for other animals during the dry season, and wanted to know if horses and donkeys might play a similar role in America.

The idea was intriguing, "especially since donkeys and horses are considered agents of biodiversity harm" as they are not native species, he said. Over the course of three summers, he and his team surveyed sites in Sonoran Desert stretching across Arizona & California.

They documented the relative contribution of wells dug by horses and donkeys compared to the surface water that was available to animals from desert streams. The team also set up camera traps to learn how other animals were utilizing the wells.

Invasion biology?

They found that wells dug by the "equids" to depths of up to



A horse digs a hole for water which was later used by a deer and its calf | AFP

six feet (two meters) increased water availability for many native desert species, and decreased the distances between important water sources during dry periods. The wells were especially important during the hottest and driest parts of summer, when they provided the only available water source at some sites.

Lundgren said the horses and donkeys acted as "buffers" against the extreme variability of desert streams from year to year. "The donkey wells kept water in the system. And these features were used by pretty much every species you could picture, including some surprising ones like black bears, that we didn't expect to see in the desert," he said.

Other species that flocked to the wells and were caught on camera included mule deer, bobcats, Woodhouse's scrub jay and javelinas. The team even spotted some river tree species sprouting from abandoned wells, indicating they also serve a role as plant nurseries.

Horses and donkeys were introduced to the Americas by Europeans to assist with the colonization of the continent.

New scouting role for Mars helicopter

SPACE

WASHINGTON: After proving powered, controlled flight is possible on the Red Planet, NASA's Mars Ingenuity helicopter has new orders: scout ahead of the Perseverance rover to assist in its search for past signs of microbial life.

The next phase extends the rotocraft's mission beyond the original month-long technology demonstration. Now, the goal is to assess how well flyers can help future exploration of Mars and other worlds.

"We're going to gather information on the operational support capability of the helicopter while Perseverance focuses on its science mission," Lori Glaze, director of NASA's Planetary Science Division, told reporters Friday. The type of reconnaissance that Ingenuity performs could one day also prove useful to human missions, by scoping out the best paths for explorers to traverse, and reaching locations that aren't otherwise possible.

The four pound (1.8 kilogram) mini chopper successfully performed the fourth of its five originally planned flights on Friday, "going farther & faster than ever before," NASA tweeted.

The fifth is planned in the coming days, then its mission will be extended, initially by one Martian month.

Whether it continues beyond that will depend on if it's still in good shape and if it's helping, rather than hindering, the rover's goals of collecting soil and rock samples for future lab analysis on Earth.

Chief engineer Bob Balaram predicted a limiting factor will be its ability to withstand the frigid Mars nights, where temperatures plunge to -130 degrees Fahrenheit (-90 degrees Celsius).

Ingenuity keeps warm with a solar-powered heater, but it was only designed to last for a month and engineers aren't sure "how many freeze and thaw cycles (it) can go through before something breaks," he said.

NASA initially thought Perseverance would be driving away from the site where it landed at the Jezero Crater on February 18, just north of the planet's equator.

Italy recovers 50k stolen items

ARTEFACTS

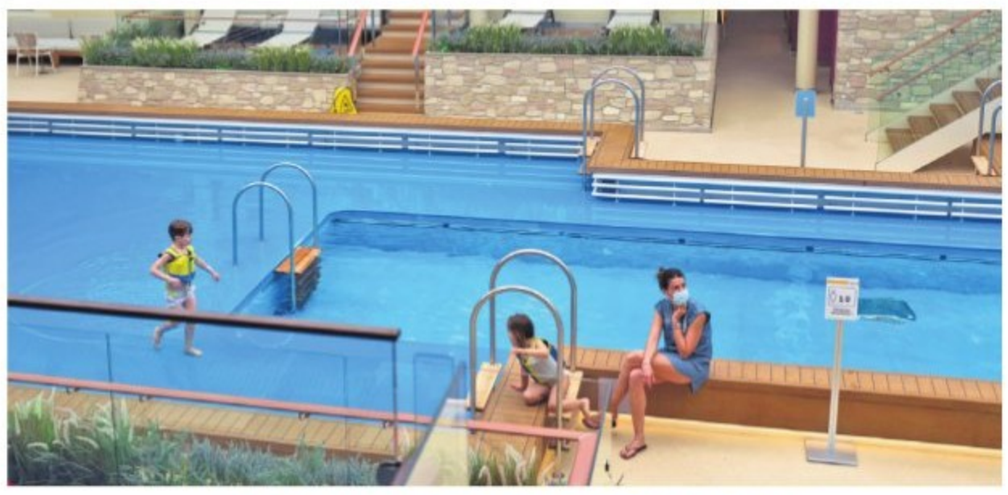
ROME: Italian authorities said Thursday they had recovered more than half a million items of stolen or counterfeit works of art in 2020, both at home and abroad.

They included the head of a Roman female deity dating to the first century AD, which stood at the entrance to the Roman Forum until 1977 when it was detached from its bust and stolen. Many recoveries were made through collaboration with foreign police forces, Europol and Interpol. One of the works repatriated was a Titian, "Portrait of a Gentleman", valued at six million euros ($7.3 million) and illegally taken to Switzerland.

The vast majority of the 501,574 items were antiquities, archives or books, but the total also included 17,596 archaeological and palaeontological works taken from illicit digs.

More than 1,500 counterfeit artworks were also seized, which if placed on the market could have raised some 415 million euros, according to a statement by specialist police.

"The meticulous work of the command for the protection of cultural heritage has never stopped, even during hard year of pandemic emergency," said Culture Minister Dario Franceschini. However, thefts of cultural heritage fell by 17.6 per cent in Italy last year — some 287 objects compared to 345 in 2019 — amid waves of closures imposed to stem the spread of coronavirus. Members of the command for protection of cultural heritage also helped out in other countries.



COMING BACK TO LIFE

Italian cruise liner Costa Cruises set to sail on Saturday after four-month break due to pandelic | AFP

South Asians at greater risk in 2nd wave: Study

HEALTH

LONDON: Minority ethnic groups in general and South Asians, in particular, had a higher risk of testing positive for SARS-CoV-2 and of COVID-19 related hospitalisations, intensive care (ICU) admissions and deaths during second wave of pandemic in the UK compared to the first, according to a new observational study of 17 million people.

Led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), the study published in the medical journal 'Lancet' on Friday accounted for a large number of explanatory variables such as household size, social factors and health conditions across all ethnic groups and at different stages of COVID-19, from testing to mortality.

"South Asian groups remained at higher risk for testing positive, with relative risks for hospitalisation, ICU admission, and death greater in magnitude in the second wave compared to the first wave," the study finds.

It found that compared with the first wave last year, the relative risk for testing positive, hospitalisation, ICU admission, and death were smaller in the pandemic second wave earlier this year for all minority ethnic communities compared to white people, with the exception of South Asian groups ' covering Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

"Despite the improvements seen in most minority ethnic groups in the second wave compared to the first, it's concerning to see that the disparity widened among South Asian groups," said Dr Rohini Mathur from LSHTM and the study's lead author.

'This highlights an urgent need to find effective prevention measures that fit with the needs of the UK's ethnically diverse population,' she said.

After accounting for age and sex, social deprivation was the biggest potential explanatory factor for disparities in all minority ethnic groups except South Asian.

In the groups, health factors such as BMI, blood pressure, underlying health conditions played the biggest role in explaining excess risks for all outcomes. Household size was an important explanatory factor for the disparity for COVID-19 mortality in South Asian groups only.

HUNTING TIME

Normal touch: Grand Canyon opens lottery for shooting bison in the park

LEISURE

FLAGSTAFF (US): The National Park Service is opening a rare opportunity for skilled shooters to help reduce the number of bison roaming the far reaches of northern Arizona. Come Monday, potential volunteers will have 48 hours to submit an application to kill the massive animals at Grand Canyon National Park this fall. Thousands of people from across the country are expected to apply. Only 12 will be chosen through a lottery system and notified in mid-May.

"It's a unique experience and you can walk a long ways before you see one, then you gotta get a shot,' said Dave Arnold, a Sun City resident and hunter who harvested a bison in 2002 in South Dakota. "That's where the fun ends. ...It's going to be a lot of work if they get a good-size animal." The non-physically fit need not apply. Much of the work will be done on foot in elevations of 8,000 feet (2,438 meters) or higher at the Grand Canyon's North Rim.

Volunteers can't use motorized transportation or stock animals to retrieve the bison that can weigh up to 2,000 pounds (907 kilograms).

Each volunteer can choose a support crew and will have to prove firearms proficiency.

Officials at the Grand Canyon say the bison increasingly have been trampling archaeological resources, creating deep ruts and wallows in meadows, and spoiling ponds. They can be hunted on the adjacent national forest, which has pushed them to make their homes almost exclusively within the Grand Canyon.

"They are very skilled climbers. They can get down in places humans can't," Grand Canyon spokeswoman Kaitlyn Thomas said. The park service released a plan in September 2017 that called for a mix of corralling the animals near the highway that leads to the North Rim and relocating them, and for skilled volunteers to shoot.

Hunting is prohibited within national parks. But the agency has authority to kill animals that harm resources, using park staff or volunteers.

Other national parks have turned to volunteer shooters to reduce the number of wildlife, including mountain goats at Olympic National Park in Washington, and elk at Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado and Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota.

Between 300 and 500 bison are on the Grand Canyon's North Rim. The park wants to reduce the number to 200, and it has made progress with corralling and relocating the animals. Grand Canyon Superintendent Ed Keable revived talks over the lethal option after they had stalled.

An agreement reached last year between the park and the Arizona Game and Fish Department lets each volunteer shooter keep up to one full bison. The work will happen in September and October.

Native American tribes will have a separate opportunity to become volunteer shooters, but those agreements aren't finalized, Thomas said. The state wildlife office will select and vet 25 applicants and forward those to the park service, which will choose 12 in a lottery. Environmental groups have said lethal removal appeases the state wildlife agency and is far less efficient than other methods.

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